

PRIDE, PREJUDICE, AND IGNORANCE
The Western Image of the Muslim Orient

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Muhammad Fahmy Raiyah

Pride, Prejudice, and Ignorance

The Western Image of the Muslim Orient

From the Advent of Islam to the Age of Enlightenment

Garant

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Preface

The present study is an academic work in which personal feelings and national and religious affiliations are subdued to the requirements of academic strictures. It by no means aims at adding to the fuel in an already combustible situation. Rather, it aims at exposing the dangers that ignorance, misunderstanding, and prejudice, might lead people into. It also reveals how the fear of the Other, often unjustified, results in the creation of myths and delusions that only bolster loathing and rejection. In a globalized atmosphere that is based on diversity, plurality, and acceptance of differences, rejection of the Other is an anachronistic stance that gives the lie to all human claims of progress. Prejudice, intolerance, and injustice are the bleak realities of our present time, as they were in the past; and overcoming them can only be attained with the power of love that transcends the narrow boundaries of race, nationality, and religion, and the power of reason that can dispel falsehoods, misconceptions, and preconceptions. Knowledge can rarely be harmful to the wise; and the present piece of scholarship hopes to enhance knowledge, not to propagate hatred, nor to foster any unwholesome hysterical reactions.

Understanding, justice, and respect of other people's religious feelings should form the proper foundations of international relations. Conflict is inevitable in a world in which some still maintain the sense of cultural superiority and a monopoly of truth and superior ideals and an urgent penchant to impose their values on the rest of the world. On the other hand, the cries of denial and denouncement of such ideas of the inevitable clash, as those of Samuel Huntington's, by no means hush the loud war cries on both sides of the divide. The religious and political discourse, not only in the West but also in the Muslim world, still very much draw upon the bitter memories of the past and smack of a highly dangerous religious conflict. A great portion of material published in print or promoted in the media only feeds into the atmosphere of clash and strife. Denial of the reality of such a perilous prospect does not help the world avoid the grave consequences. There was no other time in the history of humanity when wisdom is called for before the growing feelings of misapprehension, misunderstanding and flagrant hatred crush all hope of reconciliation. A dialogue of the wise is the hope to save the world from descending into another abyss of darkness. With this in mind, I hope the wise reader will benefit from this book.

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Introduction

The history of the relationship between the world of Islam and the West has been to a great extent central to the history of the world as it is in the present times when the future of the international community seems to depend on the outcome of the present clash between the two cultural groups, a clash that is currently conceived as a “clash of civilizations” and often popularized as such on both sides of the conflict. A better assessment of the current state of affairs can partly be attained by understanding the troubled history of the relations between Islam and the West, for all the recent dramatic events of this decade are just part of another chapter in a story of centuries of enmity and military confrontation, punctuated with brief periods of peace.

Western interest in Islam can be traced back to the seventh century, with the stepping of the new faith onto the stage of history and its rapid expansion beyond the Arabian Peninsula. Few decades after the death of Prophet Muhammad in 632 CE, the making of an image started in response to the impact of Islam on the world arena. The present Western image of Islam is as much the outcome of those early days of the encounter between Christendom and the new religion as the product of subsequent periods of confrontation and those of comparative peace and coexistence. It is the result of an amalgam of several factors: ignorance, incomprehension, prejudice, suspicion, and fear, leading to a prolonged history of hostility and distrust.

For Norman Daniel, it is not right to assign too much weight to the role of ignorance in creating the negative image of Islam in the West during the Middle Ages:

It would be a mistake to imagine that medieval writers were ill-informed. There is evidence that they [Christians] believed as much as they were willing to believe... As a result, Islam was often deformed when it was presented by Christians. In spite of this, the basic tenets of Islam were well understood by a great number of writers. (17)

Prejudice, according to Edward Said, has been far more instrumental in determining the Western attitude towards Islam and the Muslims: “I have not been able to discover any period in European or American history since the Middle Ages in which Islam was generally discussed or thought about outside a framework created by passion, prejudice, and political interests” (488). Although it is true that few Western writers were capable of dissociating themselves from the dominant frame of thinking about Islam, providing brief flashes of understanding, sympathy, and even admiration, unfortunately any favorable judgments those writers

were capable of were rather the exception to the rule than any proof of Western open-mindedness or tolerance, very rare qualities in the generally biased Western discourse of Islam.

The Western stereotypical image of Muslims at present has evolved from the stereotypical biased orientalist representations of them, which in turn drew upon medieval and Renaissance imaginary notions about Islam and its prophet, maintaining the same pejorative attitudes towards the Muslims and their religion and sustaining the Western claims of superiority over the Islamic Orient found in early writings. The Oriental Islamic world is characterized as backward, immoral, superstitious, and basically inferior. The same line of argument binds the writings of medieval and Renaissance authors with modern ones. The changes between past and present orientalist judgments are rather like changes in fashion; the same old content is dressed in new clothes. Muslims of the past were castigated as violent, cruel, sensual, and fanatic barbarians, and modern Muslims are stigmatized in modern terms as intolerant, undemocratic terrorists, oppressors of women, and enemies of modern civilization. Denunciations of Islam and the Muslim world have remained an ingrained persistent element of the Western mind.

Moreover, the image of the Other in general and of the Muslim Other in particular, has always developed in tandem with the development of the West's concept of the Self. Self-awareness and the formation of a unique identity were often part and parcel of conceptualizing the Other as a different entity; these processes of self-formation and self-understanding were attained vis-à-vis an Other. If "we ask ourselves how and when the modern notion of Europe and the European identity was born," Franco Cardini argues, "we realize the extent to which Islam was a factor (albeit a negative one) in its creation. Repeated Muslim aggression against Europe, Cardini explains,

between the seventh and to eighth and tenth centuries, then between the fourteenth and the eighteenth centuries, whether it was successful or was simply viewed as successful by the Europeans, was a "violent midwife" to Europe. And although a few historians hailed the Prophet as the "founding father" of Europe, a similar role could later be attributed to the Turkish Sultan Mohammed II and Suleiman the Magnificent, who, by forcing the continent to defend itself and to find ways and means of concerted action, encouraged it towards a stronger sense of self – and a strong sense of "the Other." (3)

According to Said, orientalism depends for its strategy on "*positional superiority*, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand" (*Orientalism* 8). In other words, creating fast and hard boundaries between West and Other or West and East is essential to the orientalist discourse. This interaction of the two creative

processes of identification was particularly pertinent to the case of the relationship of Europe and the West with the Muslim world. The present study concurs with Said's thesis of the continuity of the orientalist discourse from antiquity to the present. The medieval views of the Muslim Other were informed by the Graeco-Roman views of alien cultures, and both the Classical and the Christian conceptions of the Orient developed in relation to certain notions about the quintessence of the Western Self and the presence of certain intrinsic differences between that Self and the oriental Other. These Eurocentric preconceptions were continued during the Renaissance and the modern times, albeit assuming new and original forms.

The presence of certain constants in the Western perceptions of Islam, however, does not necessarily imply a rigid, static, or ahistorical attitude. It is important to bear in mind that the Western image of Islam, in spite of all the continuities and consistencies, does not constitute a monolithic entity. Rather, we will notice the existence of a large number of ideas, perceptions, and conceptions that were in a continual flux, development, transformation and adaptation to the historical contexts and the circumstances of place. The processes of adaptation and change were the outcome of the interplay of a myriad of cultural, political, and economic factors. The resultant effect is not that of a hardened mass, but of a fluid and dynamic mental picture that has been subject to change in keeping with the changing conditions and circumstances, while retaining many of its perpetual characteristics.

Origins of Pride

The Classical and Biblical Background

The Western image of Islam and the Muslim world can be said to have started even before the rise of Islam: the Classical and biblical views of the Arabs and the Greek historical and dramatic representations of the Persians had found their way into European thought and have since been incorporated into later portrayals of the Muslim Orient. To make sense of the challenge of Islam, medieval Europeans turned primarily to the Scriptures and the patristic writings, from which they could learn about the Arabs by relating them to the biblical Ishmaelites. The Graeco-Roman heritage then complemented the picture of the racial, moral and temperamental characteristics of the Arab conquerors. Later writers and commentators who tackled issues related to Islam and the Muslims often had at their disposal massive literature to seize upon and to deploy to new uses, superimposing earlier ideas on the new discourse. In deconstructing modern Islam and Muslims, the past knowledge about the biblical Ishmaelites, the medieval Saracens and Moors, and the Renaissance Turks have in no way been irrelevant. Since the ideas derived from the Greek and Roman sources, the Bible, and the Church Fathers have been instrumental in the construction of the Western image of the Muslim Other, it is helpful to take them as the starting point in the present discussion.

The West and the Rest: The Graeco-Roman Heritage

The Western image of other cultures in general and of the Muslim Other in particular has developed in tandem with the process of identity formation of the West itself as a differentiated construct. The notions of Western Self and foreign Other, mainly the Oriental Other, have been acquired through a process of differentiation or the creation of otherness, according to which both identities are forged simultaneously. The Western self-definition and its consciousness of itself as a unified and coherent body and its attainment of a sense of its superiority over non-Western nations start with the Greeks, the originators of the first great civilization on the European continent. In spite of the differences between the Greek city-states, the Greeks conceived of themselves as a unique nation and came to regard themselves as superior to the uncivilized barbarian nations that did not speak Greek. The incorporation of Greek theories of the barbarian Other were greatly effective in shaping the Western views of the Orient during the Middle Ages and the Renais-

sance. “Even today,” Nancy Bisaha notes, “some classically rooted ideas, such as the antagonism of East and West, continue to hold sway” (45).

While the Greeks conceived of the world as consisting of three parts: Europe, Asia, and Africa, Aristotle (384 - 322 BCE) considered the Greeks as neither European nor Asian. Aristotle’s description of the Hellenic race in comparison with other peoples contains the origins of the Europeans’ consciousness of their intrinsic and “natural” superiority over the rest of the world. Because of their intermediate location between the two continents, the Greeks had the best of both worlds:

Those who live in cold climate and in [northern] Europe are full of spirit but wanting in intelligence and skill; and therefore they keep their freedom, but have no political organization, and are incapable of ruling over others. Whereas the natives of Asia are intelligent and inventive, but they are wanting in spirit, and therefore they are always in a state of subjection and slavery. But the Hellenic race, which is situated between them, is likewise intermediate in character, being high-spirited and also intelligent. (270-71)

For most Greeks, the contrast between the “lethargic, slow to act, and ultimately corrupt” Asians and the “high-spirited,” and “intelligent” Europeans, a claim determined by the climate and which came to be based on race, “became in time another enduring stereotype of the ‘Oriental’ ” (Pagden, *Idea* 36).

This theory of climate determinism is also found in Strabo (c. 63 BCE - c. 24 CE), for whom Europe is “the quarter most favourable to mental and social ennoblement of man and produces a greater portion of comforts than the other continents” (1: 191). Whereas the harsh conditions induce a disposition towards war, the agreeable climate produces a peace-loving people. In Europe, a unique balance of the natural conditions makes for a balanced distribution of both the war-like and peaceful tendencies. “This continent is very much favoured in this respect, being interspersed with plains and mountains, so that everywhere the foundations of husbandry, civilization, and hardihood lie side by side” (1: 191-92). Hippocrates (460 - 377 BCE), too, presents similar environmental theories to explain Eastern inferiority. In his treatise *Airs, Waters and Places*, he attributes the inferiority and frailty of the Asiatic peoples to their steady climate, in contrast to the unstable climate in Greece which makes the Greeks more physically and mentally alert.

The Greeks’ sense of the superiority of their culture as compared with those of foreign nations was bolstered by their long struggle with the Persian enemy. The West-East dichotomy was rigidified by the Greeks’ realization of the inherent differences between themselves and their Asian enemies. The Asians were stereotyped in such a way as to make them the opposite of everything that was Greek. According to Zachary Lockman, the Asians, as seen by the Greeks, were

ruled by tyrants, despots whose power was absolute; the people were servile, virtually slaves; society was hierarchical, rigid, almost socially immobile, with an immense, indeed unbridgeable, gap between ruler and ruled; Asian despots and their courts might be immensely wealthy and powerful but they were also vulgar, corrupt and immoral. By contrast, the Greeks tended to depict themselves as a virtuous, modest people who treasured their liberty above all else; the city-state, the polis, was composed of free citizens mindful of their civic rights and obligations and resistant to tyranny. (13)

Major Greek writers dwelled on the differences of the political systems of their nation states and those of the Oriental nations, especially the Egyptians and the Persians. A negative attitude towards ancient Persia developed against the backdrop of the Graeco-Persian wars of the fifth century and remained in the European mind as part of its conception of the ancient Orient and later of the Muslim Orient. Greek writers particularly elaborated on the dictatorial rule of the Persian kings, differentiating it from the democratic government of the Athenians. For Herodotus (c. 484 - c. 425 BCE), the Greeks, unlike the Asians, are not subject to the will of individuals, but to the rule of law. The absolute rule of Persian tyrants is unfavorably compared with the Athenian system:

They pervert the institutions of their country, offer violence to our females, and put those whom they dislike to death, without the formalities of justice: but a democracy, in the first place, bears the honorable name of equality; the disorders which prevail in a monarchy cannot there take place. The magistrate is appointed by lot: he is accountable for his administration; and whatever is done must be with the general consent. (72)

For Plato (427 - 347 BCE), the demise of the Persian Empire was effected by their kings' recourse to despotism and through their taking away too much liberty from their people and introducing a despotic power:

We find that they grew still worse, the reason being, as we say, that by robbing the commons unduly of their liberty and introducing despotism in excess, they destroyed in the State the bonds of friendliness and fellowship. And when these are destroyed, the policy of the rulers no longer consults for the good of the subjects and the commons, but solely for the maintenance of their own power; if they think that it will profit them in the least degree, they are ready at any time to overturn States and to overturn and bum up friendly nations; and thus they both hate and are hated with a fierce and ruthless hatred. (237)

Likewise, Aristotle, in *The Politics*, associates despotism with the Orientals, in opposition to the Greek democratic values:

There is another sort of monarchy not uncommon among the barbarians, which nearly resembles tyranny. But this is both legal and hereditary. For barbarians, being more servile in character than Hellenes, and Asiatics than Europeans, do not rebel against a despotic government. Such royalties have the nature of tyrannies because the people are by nature slaves; but there is no danger of their being overthrown, for they are hereditary and legal. Wherefore also their guards are such as a king and not such as a tyrant would employ, that is to say, they are composed of citizens, whereas the guards of tyrants are mercenaries. For kings rule according to law over voluntary subjects, but tyrants over involuntary; and the one are guarded by their fellow-citizens the others are guarded against them. (133)

The anatomy of despotism and the dichotomy of despotic Orientals versus the democratic West that we find in Greek thinking has furnished European writers since the fifteenth century with the basis for the concept of “Oriental despotism,” formulated later by Montesquieu and central to the Enlightenment discourse on the East².

The Graeco-Roman early Eurocentric discourse was maintained in the writings of medieval Christian scholars, who, infusing claims of European superiority with religious significance, explained the Classical tripartite division of the world and the East-West dichotomy in the light of the Bible. For example, the great theologian Augustine (354 - 430), associates each of the three known continents and their inhabitants after the flood with each one of Noah’s sons: Japheth with Europe, Shem with Asia, and Ham with Africa. Since according to the Bible, Japheth was superior to both Shem and Ham (Genesis 9: 25-27), the Christian European descendants of Japheth are necessarily superior to the Asian and African descendants of Shem and Ham. Zachary Lockman remarks how this argument was integrated into the imperialistic ideologies of the modern West:

This hierarchical way of classifying the peoples and races of the world and fixing their place in the grand scheme of things, rooted in what Christians took to be the word of God as set forth in holy scripture, would much later be used to explain and justify the large-scale enslavement of Africans as well as European conquest and domination of non-European peoples. In secular, purportedly scientific garb it would persist well into the twentieth century and continue to influence (and legitimize) conceptions of how Europeans should treat the peoples over whom they ruled in Asia and Africa, and even how European Christians should relate to the Jewish minority living in their midst. (43)

The roots of the Eurocentric pride were thus implanted from the earliest moments of European history. Undoubtedly, it was a key factor in determining the European approach to other cultures. The arrogant belief in the supremacy of Western values is deeply rooted in all aspects of Western culture, manifested in all forms of its cultural production, and realized in the Western political conduct. It is echoed in the recent Western worldview; Samuel Huntington's highly controversial theory of the "Clash of Civilization," is not a total aberration in Western thought since it is basically premised on the long established conviction of the uniqueness of Western values:

Western concepts differ fundamentally from those prevalent in other civilizations. Western ideas of individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets, the separation of church and state, often have little resonance in Islamic, Confucian, Japanese, Hindu, Buddhist or Orthodox cultures." (Huntington 40)

Huntington's arrogant claim of the Western monopoly of such values as those mentioned here is by no means unique, since it underlies the Western self-definition and its conception of its very essence through differentiating itself from the Other.

Graeco-Roman Perceptions of the Arabs

References to Arabia and the Arabs, combining fact and fiction, can be found in a plethora of Classical geographical and historical writings, providing early insights into the land and its people. For medieval Europeans, making sense of the Muslim conquests was closely related to knowledge of the inhabitants of the land from which the new force had sprung. Both Graeco-Roman writings and the Bible satisfied this need for information about and understanding of Arabia and the Arabs.

For the Greeks, Arabia was primarily the land of spices and perfumes and the land of mystery and mysterious creatures. For Herodotus, Arabia is "the last inhabited country towards the south." It is the only country that produces frankincense, cassia, cinnamon, and myrrh. "Concerning the spices of Arabia," Herodotus tells us, "the whole of Arabia exhales a most delicious fragrance" (2: 96).

Arabia is also the land of strange birds and animals, and the Greek historian dedicates some of his most queer stories to the phoenix and flying serpents. Herodotus was probably the first to describe the phoenix, the mythical bird of Egypt, associating it also with Arabia. According to him, the phoenix appears in Egypt only once every five hundred years, when the old one dies. "It comes from Arabia to the temple of the sun, bearing the dead body of its parent enclosed in myrrh,

which it buries” (1: 214-15). Herodotus then gives the strange account of Arabia’s flying snakes: each of the frankincense trees is “guarded by a prodigious number of flying serpents, small of body, and of different colors.” To collect the frankincense, the Arabians had to burn styrax, whose smoke they believed was the only way to drive away the flying serpents; otherwise they would swarm the whole world (2: 94).

In *Geography* – the best record of world geography and its peoples known to the Romans – the Greek geographer and historian Strabo describes the different regions in Arabia, calling the southern part “Arabia Felix.” Its inhabitants are farmers, and the land is in general fertile, rich in spices, and abounds in birds and animals such as the elephants, rhinoceroses, lions, leopards, and boars, as well as all kinds of domesticated animals. Some Arabians wear skins, live in huts in trees and feed on dates from the balm trees. Some are farmers and others are tent-dwellers and camel herders. Some Nabateans also “dwell on islands situated off the coast nearby; and these Nabataeans formerly lived a peaceful life, but later, by means of rafts, went to plundering the vessels of people sailing from Egypt” (341 - 43).

The Sabaeans live in a very fertile land that produces frankincense, myrrh, and cinnamon. “On the coast is found Balsam and also another kind of herb of very fragrant smell, which quickly loses its fragrance.” Strabo also describes serpents, “span in length,” and dark-red in colour, “which can leap even as far as a hare, and inflict an incurable bite” (347).

The Sabaeans trade in aromatics with their neighbours in Syria and Mesopotamia. “On account of the abundance of fruits,” Strabo claims, the people are “lazy and easy going in their modes of life. Most of the populace sleep on the roots of trees which they have cut out of the ground.” They become drowsy by the sweet odours and “overcome the drowsiness by inhaling the incense of asphalt and goats’ beard.” They live in “effeminate luxury,” and have become prosperous by virtue of their trafficking in aromatics:

both the Sabaeans and the Gerrhaeans have become richest of all; and they have a vast equipment of both gold and silver articles, such as couches and tripods and bowls, together with drinking vessels and very costly houses; for doors and walls and ceilings are variegated with ivory and gold and silver set with precious stones. (349)

Natural History, by the Roman author Pliny (23 - 79 CE), bolsters the impression of Arabia as the land of spices and aromatics. According to Pliny, Arabia was inhabited by a group of peoples including the Scenitæ, who are nomads and tent-dwellers, whose tents “are made of goats’ hair, and they pitch them wherever they please” (83). They “live upon milk and the flesh of wild beasts” (90). The Sabæi are “the richest of all in the great abundance of their spice-bearing groves,

their mines of gold, their streams for irrigation, and their ample produce of honey and wax.” The Arabs, in Pliny’s description,

either wear the mitra, or else go with their hair unshorn, while the beard is shaved, except upon the upper lip: some tribes, however, leave even the beard unshaved. A singular thing too, one half of these almost innumerable tribes live by the pursuits of commerce, the other half by rapine: take them all in all, they are the richest nations in the world, seeing that such vast wealth flows in upon them from both the Roman and the Parthian Empires; for they sell the produce of the sea or of their forests, while they purchase nothing whatever in return. (91)

For the Roman writers, the image of the Arabs can be best summed in a later account, given during a battle against the Goths in 378, in which an Arab mercenary is described as “a man with long hair, naked except for a loin-cloth, uttering hoarse and dismal cries, with drawn dagger rushed into the thick of the Gothic army, and after killing a man, applied his lips to his throat and sucked the blood that poured out” (qtd. in Lamoreaux 9). The common denominator in Classical writings is the description of Arabia as a mysterious land of strange creatures and spices and aromatic plants, inhabited by barbarian nomads who live on trading the products of the land or on plunder.

Arabs in the Bible and Patristic Writings

The Bible, in the words of Frederick Quinn, “was the great anti-Islamic text.” Although “it made no mention of Muslims … its apocalyptic passages would soon be used against Islam” (37). The Bible, along with the writings of the Church Fathers, provided medieval people with a valuable source of information about the Arabs. The Arabs, the Ishmaelites, and the Hagarenes – or Hagarites – are mentioned frequently in the Bible, most of the references being negative. The general picture of the Arabs in the Bible presents them as tent-dweller camel-breeder wandering nomads and enemies of the Israelites. The land of Arabia is described as rich in gold, silver, and precious stones. Gold and silver were brought to Solomon from Arabia (2 Chronicles 9:14 and Ezekiel 27:22). It is also the land of spices, in which the Arabs traded with their neighbours (Genesis 37: 25).

More pertinent to the state of affairs in the seventh century was God’s promise in the book of Genesis to make the forefather of the Arabs, Ishmael, a great nation: “As for Ishmael, I have heard you; I will bless him and make him fruitful and exceedingly numerous; he shall be the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation” (Genesis 17:20). In another place, God reassures Abraham that “as for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation also, because he is your

offspring” (Genesis 21:13). It was in the light of these verses that the impact of the Muslims was initially interpreted as a fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham.

Aggression and violence as characteristics of the Arabs are foretold in the Bible; as descendants of Ishmael, the Arabs inherited their forefather’s wildness and violence: “He shall be a wild ass of a man, with his hand against everyone, and everyone’s hand against him, and he shall live at odds with all his kin” (Genesis 16:12). In more than one place in the Bible, the Arabs are presented as a fierce race; in the Book of Jeremiah, the Arabs’ proverbial wildness and their wickedness are invoked (Jeremiah 3:2), and in the Book of Psalms, the Ishmaelites and Hagaenes are listed, as two distinct races, among the hostile neighbours of the Israelites (Psalms 83:6).

Medieval Europeans also looked in the patristic writings in search of an explanation for the coming of the Arabs. The works of Jerome, Augustine, and Isidore of Seville shed more light on the biblical Arabs that could be utilized in understanding the new phenomenon. Jerome (342 - 420), the most outstanding Christian scholar of his day and the translator of the Bible into Latin, lived in Syria and the Holy Land for several years, so his references to the Arabs, referred to in his earlier writing as Saracens, are based on first-hand experience. For him, the Arabs are basically uncivilized desert nomads and tent-dwellers. While Jerome considered that the “Ishmaelites,” “Hagarenes,” and “Saracens” were the same people, inhabitants of Arabia, he did not identify them with the biblical Arabs (Beckett 91). Jerome claimed that the term “Saracens” was derived from Sara to refer to the Ishmaelites’ claim of descent from Abraham’s wife. The Saracens in Jerome’s writings, are nomadic marauders, who attack caravans and live on plunder: “the Saracens roam to and fro without having any fixed abode. Through fear of them, travellers in those parts assemble in numbers, so that by mutual assistance they may escape impending danger” (615). In one account of such an assault, Jerome relates how the Saracens attacked his group on horses and camels:

with their flowing hair bound with fillets, their bodies half-naked, with their broad military boots, their cloaks streaming behind them, and their quivers slung upon the shoulders. They carried their bows unstrung and brandished their long spears; for they had come not to fight, but to plunder. (615)

As for their religion, they are idolaters who worshipped Venus to the time of his writing in the fourth century (885).

Katharine Scarfe Beckett points out how medieval stereotypical views of the Arabs correspond to the modern Western image of the Muslim Orient as expounded by Edward Said:

Certain ideas about Islam and the Orient seem to be shared by scholars in both periods. ‘Latent’ Orientalism and ‘manifest’ Orientalism – as Said de-

fines them – and their complicated relations with literature, prejudice and institutional power can be read into western literature from at least as early as the fourth century. Even later expressions of European technological superiority find parallels in Jerome’s descriptions of the Saracens as nomads and eaters of raw flesh or Adomnán’s statement that although their house of prayer was large, it was crudely built on ruins. (115)

The importance of Jerome in shaping the medieval picture of the Arabs and his role in setting the medieval mind against the Muslim people was enormous. In addition to being the paramount scholar of the Bible, his residence in Palestine further reinforced his authority on the subject, as Beckett remarks:

The broad dissemination in the early medieval West of Jerome’s statements created an audience who understood the Saracens and the Old Testament Ismaelites as one and the same people which was connected with the region of Arabia and inimical towards Christianity. The Ismaelites were interpreted as the uncovenanted descendants of the hostile and desert-dwelling son of Abraham’s concubine. This image promoted a strong religious antipathy towards their latter-day descendants, the Saracens... Jerome’s words were to be cited for centuries on the violence and wandering nature of the Saracens. (114)

Jerome’s comments were later taken up by another important Christian scholar, Isidore of Saville (c 560 - 636). In his encyclopedic work, *Etymologies*, Isidore provides a detailed description of the geography and natural history of Arabia, its trees and its strange animals and birds, in addition to comments on its inhabitants. In addition to being the most producer of camels - according to him, the Arabian camels have two humps on their backs – Arabia is also the home of winged venomous snakes that move faster than horses and that can fly (263, 257). Arabia is the birthplace of the “phoenix,” described before by Herodotus. Its precious stones include the sardonyx, iris crystal, malachite, and opals (286).

Isidore explains the different terms used to describe the Arabs. The Arabs or the “Arabics” (*Arabicus*), Isidore tells us, “are so named because they originated in Arabia; they say that the soul dies with the body, and each one will rise again in the last age” (177). According to him, the word ‘Arabia’ means “sacred”; “it is interpreted to mean this because the region produces incense and perfumes: hence the Greeks called it ‘happy’, our Latin speakers *beatus* ‘happy’” (286). Ishmaelites, Isidore explains, are also called “Saracens,” as if they descended from Sara:

The Saracens are so called either because they claim to be descendants of Sarah or, as the pagans say, because they are of Syrian origin, as if the word was *Syriginae*. They live in a very large deserted region. They are

also Ishmaelites, as the Book of Genesis teaches us, because they sprang from Ishmael. They are also named Kedar, from the son of Ishmael, and Agarines, from the name Agar (i.e. Hagar). As we have said, they are called Saracens from an alteration of their name, because they are proud to be descendants of Sarah. (195)

Etymologies, in the words of Tolan, was “the best-seller of the Middle Ages, surviving in close to one thousand medieval manuscripts” (*Saracens* 5). Along with the other patristic writings, it “had an abiding influence on medieval conceptions of the Ismaelites and Saracens” (Beckett 114). In introducing the medieval Europeans to the biblical Arabs, these writings played a major role in the making of the Western image of the Muslims even before the coming of Islam.

Apocalypse Now

The Impact of Islam on Eastern Christians

The first Christian interpretation of Islam started in the Middle East among Oriental Christians. After Islam prevailed in Arabia, it began to spread in the east at the expense of the two dominant world empires of the time, the Sassanian Persian Empire and the Byzantine Empire. A series of swift decisive victories resulted in a change of the world order of the Middle Ages: following such battles as those of Qadisyya (632) and Nahawand (642) over the Persians, and that of Yarmuk (636) over the Byzantines, along with the capture of Egypt by Muslims in 642, Islam's foothold was established in the east, becoming both a source of military menace to the remaining of the Byzantine Empire and a cultural and ideological challenge to the Christian world. Islam grew up in the Middle East against the backdrop of the disintegration of the Christian Church into a large number of competing sects, divided over the nature of the person of Christ, some of them affirming his divinity and others emphasizing his humanity. In 451, the Council of Chalcedon, summoned by the Byzantine emperor, asserted the doctrine of the two natures, supporting the inseparability of Christ's godhead from his manhood. As a result, other beliefs that existed such as Monophysitism and Nestorianism were considered by the Council as heresies.

The appearance of Muhammad and the spread of his message among Easterners caused a huge public shock and represented a real challenge to the world of Christendom. Taken by surprise and stunned by the rapid success of Islam in the battlefield, the Byzantine Christians were slow in responding to the challenge. Gradually, the Christian response began to appear in a variety of cultural shapes, ranging from the highly passionate reflections on the events in the form of apocalyptic literature to the polemical critiques of the new system of belief.

In the early responses to the Muslim conquests, little thought was given to the religion of the invaders, who were grouped with the Germanic barbarians as another race of the invaders who had overrun Christian territories for many centuries. The conquests were conceived merely as a military threat, and early reactions dwelled upon the scenes of devastation and deplored the atrocities committed against the Christian communities and the ruining of Christian Churches and shrines. Drawing upon biblical and Classical references, the Arabs were seen as a ferocious and idolatrous race, referred to the “robbers of Arabia,” or the “wolves of Arabia” (Lamoreaux 10). For the early Christian commentators, the Muslim invasions confirmed this early stereotypical view of the Arabs as predatory pagans.

The earliest Christian explanation of the rise and triumph of Islam at the expense of the world of Christendom rested in the view of the new religion as a pun-

ishment of erring Christians, a scourge of God on those who deviated from the orthodox faith and for the heretic views that proliferated among them. Alternatively, given the discovered commonalities between Islam and Christianity, Islam came to be conceived as just another Christian heresy. Many saw the Muslim invasions as a fleeting danger and expressed hope of defeating the Muslims and putting an end to their threat. In the Christmas sermon of 634, Sophronios, the patriarch of Jerusalem, saw the invasions of “the godless Saracens” of Palestine as a punishment of God for the sins of the Christians. The Saracens could be destroyed if Christians returned to the right principles of Christianity:

Therefore I call on and I command and I beg you for the love of Christ the Lord, in so far as it is in our power, let us correct ourselves, let us shine forth with repentance, let us be purified by conversion and let us curb our performance of acts which are hateful to God. If we constrain ourselves, as friendly and beloved of God, we would laugh at the fall of our Saracen adversaries and we would view their not distant death, and we would see their final destruction. For their blood-loving blade will enter their hearts, their bows will be shattered and their shafts will be fixed in them. They will not furnish a clear way for us having neither hills nor thorns nor impassable points so that we, running boldly and dauntlessly, may possess the child of life, may love the God-receiving chamber, may prostrate ourselves before the holy manger. We shall embrace the God-producing city [Bethlehem] dancing with lambs, shouting with the magi, giving glory with the angels: “Glory to God in the Highest and on earth, peace and good will to men.” (qtd. in Kaegi, 141)

Apocalyptic Literature

To grapple with the new challenge and to make sense of the stunning success of the Arabs and their rapid expansion, the Bible provided for Eastern Christians a framework of history and a basis for understanding the phenomenon of Islam and explaining the plight of the Christians. The invasions and the process of Islamicization were viewed in the context of early biblical and patristic prophesies such as the *Book of Daniel*, the *Book of Revelation*, and other prophetic writings. Christian apocalyptic literature describing the trials and tribulations at the end of the world were invoked to account for the present calamities. The Syriac seventh century *The Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, which was translated into Arabic and Greek and later into Latin, was one of the apocalyptic writings generated in response to the Muslim invasions. It had a wide circulation and an extensive influence on later treatments of the invasions and on Western and Slavonic Christian apocalyptic thought; almost a thousand years after its Syriac composition,

excerpts from the *Apocalypse* were distributed among the defenders of Vienna to strengthen their resolution against the Turkish siege of the city (Beckett 144).

The author of the book remains anonymous although the manuscript falsely attributes it to the third century writer Methodius, bishop of Olympus. Numerous Versions of this work, including one in verse, were accessible to medieval English writers. The author divides the world history into seven thousand-year periods from Adam and Even to the Byzantine Empire before it ventures into the prophetic account of the Muslim invasions presented as a prelude to the end of time.

The *Apocalypse* attributes the Islamic victories to the sins of the Christians and portends the imminent defeat of the Arabs. In the seventh millennium, according to the book's chronology, when the Persian Empire will be destroyed, "the sons of Ishmael will come out from the desert of Yathrib," and this will be a fulfillment of God's promise to destroy them (139). By analogy with taking of the Holy Land by the Jews as a punishment of its inhabitants, the Arabs are not favored by God, but they are sent as a punishment for the sins of the Christians, particularly their licentiousness and dissolution: "It is not because God loves them that He allows them to enter into the kingdom of the Christians, but because of the inequity and the sin that is being wrought by the Christians, the like of which has never been done in any of the former generations." The author catalogues the different types of the sexual sins of people:

Men would dress up in the voluptuous clothes of harlots. They would adorn themselves like maidens, and standing publicly in the marketplace of the cities, they would rage with drunkenness and shameless intemperance and have intercourse with one another. And also harlots would stand openly in the marketplaces. A man would come in and fornicate, and when he would leave, his son would come and commit abomination with the same (woman); brothers, fathers and sons, all together would commit abomination with one woman. Because of this, the Apostle Paul said, "Their males left the natural use of women and burned with lust for one another, and males did shameful things among themselves." So also the women: they left the natural use of men, and had intercourse in an unnatural way. Therefore God is delivering them over to the defilement of the barbarians. Even the mighty men will suffer in the chastisement of the afflictions, and their women will be defiled with the sons of abomination (140)

The book predicts the Muslims' overrunning over the lands of Persia, Armenia, Syria, and Egypt, "like the locusts which are gathered by a whirlwind," and their spreading "hunger and calamity and pestilence" and subjugating these places to "to the yoke of tribute and tax" (142). The author dwells upon images of ruin and destruction, allegedly incurred by the Arab conquests, to depict the Muslims in the most horrible and detestable way possible:

These barbarian rulers are not men, but sons of destruction, and they set their faces toward destruction, and they are sent for desolation. They are ruination, and they come forth for the ruin of everything, being abominable people who love abomination. At the time of their coming forth from the desert, they will tear open pregnant women; and they will take babies by force from their mother's arms and dash them against the rocks like unclean animals. They will sacrifice the ministers within the temple, and then they will sleep with their wives and with the captive women inside the temple. They will make the sacred garments into clothing for themselves and their sons. They will tether their cattle in the shrines of the martyrs and in the burial places of the saints. They are insolent and murderous, shedders of blood and spoilers; they are a furnace of trial for all Christians. (144-45).

The *Apocalypse* sees the Arab conquest as a prelude to more invasions, Gog and Magog, after whose destruction by God, the Antichrist will be born and defeated, paving the way for the Second Coming of Christ. Like Sophronios, the author foretells the ultimate victory of the Byzantines and the end of the Muslim rule. After the long anticipation of Christian populations, suddenly “the king of the Greeks will come against [the Muslims] with great anger,” pouring “desolation and destruction in the desert of Yathrib.” The author lingers with delight on the sufferings that the Byzantines will inflict upon the Muslims as a divine punishment. The King will take their wives and their children captive, and

the sons of the king of the Greeks will seize the regions of the desert and will finish by the sword any survivor left among them in the Promised Land. Fear will fall upon them from all sides. They, their wives and their sons, their leaders and all their camps, the whole land of the desert of their fathers will be delivered into the power of the king of the Greeks. They will be given over to the sword, to destruction, captivity and slaughter. Their oppression will be one hundredfold stronger than their own yoke. They will be in a hard calamity of hunger, [thirst], and exhaustion. They will be enslaved, they and their wives and their children. They will serve as the slaves of those who were serving them. And their servitude will be one hundredfold more bitter than theirs. (149)

Whereas Sophronios and the author of *Pseudo-Methodius* focus on the horrors of the Arab conquests and predictions of Byzantine recovery and the ultimate defeat of the Muslims, both show little interest in the religion of the invaders. The Muslim rule is nothing more than a temporary situation that will be eradicated like other fleeting invasions of the preceding centuries.

Whereas the late seventh-century Armenian historian Sebeos presents a similar view of the Arab conquests from the perspective of biblical and patristic

prophecies, Sebeos' *History* reveals some understanding of the religion of the Arabs:

there was an Ishmaelite called Mahmet, a merchant; he presented himself to them as though at God's command, as a preacher, as the way of truth, and taught them to know the God of Abraham, for he was very well informed and very well acquainted with the story of Moses. Since the command came from on high, they all came together, at a single order, in unity of religion, and, abandoning vain cults, returned to the living God who had revealed himself to their father Abraham. (qtd. in Lockman 23)

Gradually, it became clear to the Christian population under the new rule that the Muslims were there to stay and that they were introducing a religious system of their own. With this growing awareness of the Muslims as a religious Other, Islam came to represent a spiritual challenge. The new perception of the Islamic rule as a permanent condition required a different kind of response; rather than the need to explain the decline of Christianity in the Byzantine provinces as a mere vehicle of divine chastisement, there arose the need to deal with the new rulers, whose religion is now acknowledged as a monotheistic religion claiming to supplant Christianity.

It is generally acknowledged that Christians entertained a considerable measure of freedom under the Muslim rule. They were guaranteed freedom of worship and exempted from military duty in exchange for a certain tribute, *jiziah*. The Muslim rulers relied on the Christian inhabitants in administering the affairs of the growing empire. Many of them were appointed by caliphs in high administrative positions, hired for their professional expertise and their knowledge. The Bakhtishu family of medical practitioners, and Hunayn Ibn Ishaq, his son Ishaq, and many others played a major role in the translation activities patronized by the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates.

Polemical Writings

However, as the *dhimmis*, or the people of protection, saw with consternation the crumbling of their world and the predominance of the Arabs in the previously land of Christianity, they felt the need to come to terms with the new situation, to defend their faith and to prevent conversions. Many polemics and apologetics were thus written to prove the superiority of the Christian faith, to refute the beliefs of the new religion, and to counter the tide of conversions. The growing tendency of Christian polemicists to view Islam as the religious rival, elaborating upon the differences and overlooking the similarities between the two faiths determined the evolution of the Western ways of thinking about Islam for centuries.

Again, for the first polemicists, the biblical prophesies of the end of the world supplied the needed explanation. The belief in the appearance of Antichrist, leading the believers astray before the second coming of Christ at the end of time provided the historical framework for explaining Islam and its role in the divine scheme. Many polemicists associated Islam with Antichrist or considered Muhammad as Antichrist or a precursor of Antichrist. Muhammad's denial of the divinity of Jesus and the Muslim invasion of Jerusalem evoked biblical prophesies of false prophets who would lead the believers astray. According to the book of Mathews, "false christ and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect" (Matt. 24:24). Moreover, the biblical genealogy helped shed light on the origin and nature of the invaders. In that respect, the Muslim invasions were seen as a fulfillment of the biblical prophesies about Ishmael, the son of Abraham from Hagar. Announcing the birth of her child to Hagar, the angel tells her that "he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand will be against him" (Gen. 16:12). Accordingly, many early commentators depicted the Arabs, whom they often called Ishmaelites or Saracens as a bellicose nation predisposed to violence and aggression.

The writings of Yuhanna ibn Mansour ibn Sargun, better known as John of Damascus (c. 675- c.749), were particularly important in the formation of the Byzantine response to Islam. Born in a prominent Christian Arab family in Damascus, John, like both his father and grandfather, held a high official position in the city before he retired to the monastery of Mar Saba in Palestine. John knew both Arabic and Greek and through his upbringing among and mingling with Muslims, he was able to acquire a reasonable first-hand understanding of Islamic beliefs and practices and a reasonable knowledge of the Qur'an.

In "On Heresies," part of *The Fount of knowledge*, John deals with Islam, "the superstition of the Ishmaelites," as he calls it, depending on its original sources, including the Qur'an, from which he quotes frequently. John includes Islam in his list of a hundred and one Christian heresies. He begins his discussion with a note on the origin of the Ishmaelites, among whom this "superstition" still "to this day prevails and keeps people in error." He notes that they are also called "Agarenes," from Ager, and Saracens, or "destitute of Sara." They are "very great idolaters," who worshipped the morning star and Aphrodite. Vestiges of their idolatry, John says, are still noticed in their veneration of the black stone, which is "a head of that Aphrodite whom they used to worship and whom they called Khabár (153).

For John, Muhammad knew the Old and New Testaments and with the help of an Arian monk formulated his own heresy. He wrote the Qur'an himself and deceived people into believing that it was revealed to him from God. John also believed that Islam, in general, not Muhammad in particular, is "a forerunner of the Antichrist" (153). He attacks the Qur'an as "ridiculous," and criticizes Islam's laws of marriage and divorce, particularly its permitting of polygamy. John's attack on the character of Muhammad focuses on the prophet's lustful

behaviour, his polygamy, and his marrying Zaynab after divorcing her from his adopted son Zeid.

For John of Damascus, the Muslim conquests were a “passing phenomenon” (Daniel, *Arabs* 17), and he still hopefully expected the Byzantines to defeat them; in one of his hymns, he indeed prays for the Emperor’s victory. Although Meyendorff argues that John was “neither original nor better informed than other Greeks” (Meyendorff 118), many of the ideas he presented about Islam were repeated by other writers of Christian polemics; and John’s treatment of the subject set the tone for the Byzantine response to Islam: the story of the monk who assisted Muhammad in devising his heresy found a wide acceptance among Byzantine writers and later in the West, and discrediting the Qur’an and denigrating the Prophet of Islam have persisted as powerful tools in polemical writings against Islam after him.

The military confrontation between the Byzantine Empire and the Muslim state was not the sole aspect of the relationship between the two opposing contenders; cultural and religious contacts were maintained along the frontiers of conflict. During the Abbasid caliphate, contacts with other cultures greatly developed, and a huge translation movement flourished. The caliph Al-Ma’mun (813 - 833) established Baytulhykmah (House of Wisdom) to arrange for translations from Greek and other languages into Arabic. Many translators were Christians, and Hunayn Ibn-Ishaq was the most prominent one. Sometimes, Baytulhykmah was even headed by Christian scholars such as Yuhanna Ibn-Haylan and Yahya Ibn-Adi. Interested in intellectual and religious questions, Al-Ma’mun arranged for a series of religious debates, in which he personally was engaged. Religious discussions or debates over a great range of doctrinal issues related to the Christian and Islamic creeds between Muslim and Christian theologians were held in the presence of a caliph or prince. Some of them were then put to writing. In some cases, the characters of the dialogues could be fictitious. The very existence of these debates or theological disputations attests to the tolerance of the emerging Muslim state and its openness to other cultures.

Among the Christian figures who participated in these debates were Theodore Abu-Qurra and Abdel-Masih Al-Kindi. Theodore Abu-Qurrah (755 - 830), the Arab Orthodox bishop of Harran and disciple of John of Damascus, lived under the rule of Islam and wrote in both Arabic and Greek. His writings reveal a sense of the uneasiness of living under the control of a foreign hostile power. As a Christian *mutakallim*, Abu-Qurra was a main figure in the cultural life of the Abbasid Baghdad. Theodore employed the method of reasoning known in Islamic philosophy as *Kalam* to confirm the truth of the Christian doctrine and to argue for the fallibility of Islam. In addition to Abou-Qurrah’s polemical treatise *On the Existence of the Creator and on the True Religion*, his collection entitled *Against the Outsiders* comprises eight dialogues in Arabic with various Muslim interlocutors, including the caliph Al-Ma’mun. The dialogues are presented as real encounters between the author and his Muslim antagonists. Instead of referring the audience

solely to the scriptures, the dialogues employ inductive reasoning, analogies, and practical examples to confirm the readers' certainty in the Christian creeds by refuting the claims of its critics and to prove the falsehood of Islam.

In *The Risalah, or The Apology*, Abdel-Masih Al-Kindi, an Arab Nestorian Christian, attacks Islam in an unprecedented harsh tone. Invited to convert to Islam, he declines and attacks the tenets of the Islamic religion and the character of its prophet. Al-Kindi rejects Muhammad as a false prophet because he did not predict future events and did not perform miracles. He also finds fault with the Prophet's character, citing his use of violence and his harsh treatment of women. Al-Kindi questions the authenticity of the Qur'anic text and attacks its teachings about women and Holy War. The mere possibility of permitting such a harsh and offensive attack as that of Al-kindi's testifies to the freedom of thought in the Islamic state and the spirit of tolerance that characterized its treatment of other faiths. Al-Kindi's treatise was extremely influential on Western writers, as it was translated in Spain by William of Toledo and its influence is evident in the polemical writings produced during the Spanish Martyrs' Movement. It was also popularized by its inclusion in Vincent de Beauvais' *Speculum Historiale*. In the nineteenth century, William Muir published a translation of it for the benefit of the Missionary movement in India.

The change in tone in the Muslim-Christian theological debate that can be detected in Al-Kindi's treatise and which begins to characterize Byzantine Christian writings of the ninth century can partly be explained by the ongoing military conflict along the borders between the Byzantine Empire and the growing Islamic state. For those who lived on the other side of the conflict, in Christian Byzantium, Islam was the religion of the enemies, hence the growing note of animosity and the denunciation of the prophet of Islam that we see in the works of Theophanes the Confessor and Nicetas of Byzantium. The work of Theophanes the Confessor (759 - 812) is a typical example of the Byzantine perception of Islam during the ninth century. Theophanes displays a reasonable knowledge of the biography of the Prophet and the rise of Islam although he employs his knowledge to polemic ends. For him, the loss of the greater part of Christendom to the Arabs signified God's wrath against Christians because of the heresies that spread among them. Like John of Damascus, he treats Islam as a Christian heresy composed of Christian and non-Christian elements. Theophanes presents new explanations to account for the origins of Islam and to describe the character of Muhammad. Two examples of his deliberate distortions of early Islamic history are his description of the Prophet as epileptic and the story of the heretic monk.

According to Theophanes, Muhammad suffered from epilepsy, to the disappointment and dismay of his wife Khadijah. To appease his wife's consternation and shame at her husband's sickness and poverty, Muhammad claimed that he was receiving divine revelation. The reference to Muhammad's deceitful stratagem to redeem his reputation serves Theophanes' double purpose of discrediting Muham-

mad's character, by showing him as a guileful and deceitful person, and shattering the Muslim claim of the Qur'an's divine origin. Muhammad, Theophanes claims, lived among Jews and Christians and knew their scriptures. He received the assistance of a heretic monk in his claim to prophethood. When Khadija consulted that monk on Muhammad's account of Gabriel's appearing to him, he convinced her of her husband's prophethood. The story of the monk adds to the notion of Islam as being a depraved form of Christianity.

While John of Damascus was condemned by his coreligionists as "Saracen minded" because of his mild approach to Islam, the writings of Nicetas of Byzantium (842 - 912) to refute the Islamic beliefs are infused with considerable bile and fury. He describes the Qur'an as a lying book and Muhammad as a false prophet or imposter. For Nicetas, Muhammad was "the son of the father of lies," and Islam was a "bad and noxious religion" (qtd. in Wheatcroft 45). The book of Islam has its origin from the demon, and the Muslims' god is the devil (qtd. in Demitriades 63). Given their confrontational context, these writings can be seen as part of the Byzantine war propaganda against Islam, prompted by the repeated sieges of Constantinople.

The Eastern Christians' reply to the challenge of Islam constitutes the first phase in the encounter between the Muslim world and the West. The diverse topics discussed and the different types of writings and the strategies utilized during that early period were very influential upon the later Western knowledge about and attitude towards Islam. Notwithstanding their exasperation, the Arab Christians living as *dhimmis* responded to Islam differently from the Byzantine observers, whose more academic writings were less tolerant and more ideological and subject to the exigencies of war propaganda. Unfortunately, it was the relatively more hostile and less knowledgeable views of the Greek Byzantines that reached Latin Europe through the Christians of Spain, especially during the Martyrs' Movement.

Ignorance And Prejudice

Medieval Europe

While eastern Christians were the first to face the challenge of Islam, most Western Christians remained unaware of or uninterested in the new religion until the Muslims' invasion of the Iberian Peninsula, starting in 711. In the earliest references to the Saracens by European chroniclers, the spread of Islam in Asia and the coming of the Muslims to Spain are mentioned with little interest in the invaders' religious beliefs or practices. Muslims are treated as just another one of the many invaders that ravaged Europe during the Middle Ages. As Tolan states, "Christian European writers showed little curiosity about the religion of these invaders, be they Saracens, Vikings, or Magyars. They all seemed to be part of the terrible tribulations through which God was putting His people" (*Saracens*, 75). The lack of attention to the subject of Islam as a religion in northern Europe was partly due to the physical distance of the Muslims and the diminishing of the military threat posed by them after the Muslim defeat in the battle of Poitiers in 732.

The later medieval response to Islam was the outcome of contact with the Muslims in Spain, where the Christian *dhimmis* developed a religious polemic similar to that of eastern Christians, with the purpose of impeding conversions and defying the legitimacy of the Muslim rule. The writings of the Spanish Christians, considered by R. W. Southern as "the first rigidly coherent and comprehensive view of Islam...to be developed in the West" (25), found their way into northern Europe and helped formulate the ideas of northern Europeans regarding the Muslims and their faith. The eastern polemical views of Islam forged in the Middle East and the Byzantine Empire, especially Al-Kindy's *Apology* had already been incorporated in the Spanish body of polemical writings. Moreover, medieval ideas about Islam and the Muslims were also influenced by Latin and early ecclesiastical conceptions of pre-Islamic Arabs as found in the works of Jerome and Isidore of Seville. Jerome was particularly influential upon medieval writers with regard to understanding the Arabs, their origin and their land. In addition to the Byzantine and Spanish influences, medieval views of Islam also revolved around and took shape in response to some of the major historical events of the Middle Ages, namely, the *Reconquista* and the Crusades. The medieval European image of the Muslims was greatly influenced by the religious wars against the Saracens in Spain and in the Holy Land. These wars, which were in part the product of the earlier negative portrayal of the Muslims and Islam in the East and in Moorish Spain, have generated some of the most offensive and legendary material about Islam during the Middle Ages, which was in turn extremely influential in formulating the false picture of Islam for centuries to come and which tenaciously inhabited the Western mind to the present.

The Anglo Saxon's Response to Islam

Unlike the Christian *dhimmis* in the Middle East or in Spain, people in northern Europe saw Islam from their detached vantage point as both a remote and an obscure danger. The negative portrayal of the Arabs in the Bible was once again the early medieval writers' starting point for understanding the Muslim invasions. In his *Ecclesiastical History of the English Church and People*, the Anglo-Saxon historian the Venerable Bede (c. 672 - 735) expresses the belief that the Saracens are sent by God as divine chastisement for Christian sins. As descendants of Ishmael, their coming, Bede shows, is foretold in the Bible in the Book of Genesis 16:12 (Beckett 18). And like their biblical ancestor, the Saracens are war-like and brutal. Commenting on the Arab conquest of Spain, Bede writes:

In the year of our Lord's incarnation 729, two comets appeared about the sun, to the great terror of the beholders. One of them went before the rising sun in the morning, the other followed him when he set at night, as it were presaging much destruction to the east and west; one was the forerunner of the day, and the other of the night, to signify that mortals were threatened with calamities at both times. They carried their flaming tail towards the north, as it were ready to set the world on fire. They appeared in January, and continued nearly a fortnight. At which time a dreadful plague of Saracens ravaged France with miserable slaughter; but they not long after in that country received the punishment due to their wickedness. (291)

Bede is referring here to the Muslims' defeat in the battle of Poitiers at the hands of Charles Martel. Throughout his writings, Bede shows little curiosity in the religion of the invaders. Dorothea Meltlitzki also notes Bede's "lack of rancor" in his historical account of the Muslims. Bede's awareness of the Saracens did not concern itself "beyond the feeling that they were a visitation, a sore plague like other misfortunes which had befallen the Christian world for its sins." Bede's religious approach to world history made him explain it as an unfolding of God's purpose. In the light of this religious outlook, "the Saracens must be punished for their unbelief." However, "the nature of this unbelief and of its professors," as Meltlitzki notes, "did not stir a flicker of interest in the most comprehensive mind of the time in Latin Europe" (14). Whereas Meltlitzki's commentary is based on Bede's major historical work, *Ecclesiastical History*, Katharine Beckett remarks that in his exegetical writings, Bede, following Jerome, presents the Saracens as idolaters and worshipers of Venus. More importantly, Bede's identification of the Muslims of his times with the biblical Ishmaelites situates them in a religious framework as the enemies of Christianity.

Other Anglo-saxon works and translations helped consolidate the picture of Muslims as the religious rivals of Christianity. In the Latin versions of the Syriac

The Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius, which reached England in the late Anglo-Saxon period, the translator makes extensive changes to make the book's prophetic content more relevant and applicable to the historical situation of the day. The book's central hypothesis that "the true Christian empire would never fall and that Muslim triumph was a temporary and purifying chastisement to test the faithful before the (imminent) arrival of the kingdom of heaven" (144) is emphasized by the identification of Muslims with the Old Testament Ishmaelites. The numerous similarities between the biblical descriptions of the desert Ishmaelites and the Muslim invaders establish this identification in the minds of readers. Another work that leaves little doubt about this identification is Jerome's *Vita Malchi*, translated into Old English in the tenth or eleventh century. In this work, the terms Ishmaelite and Saracen are explicitly used interchangeably for the first time in the vernacular.

In a similar vein to the *Pseudo-Methodius*, Aelfric (c. 955 - c. 1020), the theologian and abbot of Eynsham depicts the Saracens in one of his homilies as uncivilized desert people and usurpers of the Holy Land. Although he mentions Arabs in many of his works, he separates them from the Saracens in a way that is characteristic of Old English. Neither does he associate the Saracens with the Ishmaelites in any of his writings. Like the *Pseudo-Methodius*, he makes the Persians and Saracens allies against the Romans. The fact that Aelfric did not need to explain his references to the Saracens and their anti-Christian activity indicates that "by the end of the eleventh century, Saracens were known in Anglo-Saxon England outside a highly educated Latin context" (Beckett 187).

After the Norman Conquest, patristic and Classical writings continued to be imported to and copied in England. Along with the new sources of information about the Saracens, especially those associated with the Crusades, those early texts remained to be circulated in the following centuries. The authority that those antiquated texts had for the medieval people indicates that their ideological and practical utility surpassed their correspondence to reality.

Despite the increased contacts between Christian and Muslim cultures, and despite increasing mutual knowledge among representatives of the faiths, early Latin analyses continued to inform later Latin and, eventually, English polemic, commentaries, histories and other writings on Islam. From the creation of the Vulgate Bible through the Islamic conquests to the Crusades, the learned pursuit of assimilating Saracens within a hostile and purportedly scriptural tradition survived far beyond the twelfth century. The idea of Saracens as Ismaelites and Hagarenes continued in England and abroad, often, ultimately, traceable to Jerome's writings. In many later cases, the author does explain the names Ismaelitae or Agarenae, but sometimes still puts them into an exegetical context intended to influence contemporary understanding and even action. (Beckett 192)

The body of patristic and theological negative writings available to the readers of the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries helped prepare the medieval mind during the early Middle Ages to accept elaborations and amplifications on the already established preconceptions about the Saracens. The anxiety that medieval Europeans felt towards Islam grew with the increase of proximity, particularly when Islam became on Europe's doorstep in the Iberian Peninsula. The inflammatory rhetoric of the Reconquista and the Crusades and the offensive legendary material that accompanied them were thus introduced to a ready-to-accept audience. The persistence of some preconceptions and false ideas in the face of more factual eye-witness accounts attests to this readiness on the part of readers and authors to believe certain things about their enemies and to present them as being in the wrong in the teeth of all evidence.

The Moors in Spain: The Cordovan Martyrs' Movement

Although many of the polemical writings of Arab and Byzantine Christians made their way to Spain, it was the *Mosarabs* – the name used to describe the Spanish Christians living under Islamic rule – who played the major role in creating the response to Islam that persisted in Europe during the Middle Ages and beyond. Most of the information about Islam and the negative views associated with it seem to have come to Medieval Europe from Spain through the works of writers linked with the ninth century Martyrs Movement in Cordoba, particularly those of Paul Alvarus and Eulogius (Goddard 80-81). Moreover, the heightened religious fervor and the growing feelings of hatred against Muslims that accompanied the incidents of the Martyrs' movement helped stimulate the crusading spirit in Spain, and spreading from it to the rest of Europe, it culminated in the Crusades against the Muslims in the East.

In 711, a Muslim army, under the leadership of Tariq ibn-Ziyad, crossed the Strait of Gibraltar from northern Africa into the Iberian Peninsula. In the course of one decade, the Muslim rule was supreme from the coast to the Pyrenees. However, the Islamic progress northwards was arrested in 732, when Charles Martel defeated the Muslim forces in the battle of Poitiers near Tours. Generally, Christians in Muslim Spain were given protection and freedom of worship in spite of the few restrictions on their public display of religious practices. Understandably, any blasphemous pronouncements against the Qur'an or the Prophet were totally forbidden. But, in spite of the material prosperity and the freedom that the Mosarabs entertained, discontent among some groups was steadily growing as a result of their dissatisfaction with the dominance of Arabic and Islamic culture.

The accounts of Spanish chroniclers writing after the conquest reflect a lack of concern with the religion of Islam, and the first serious reaction to Islam came almost after a century of the Muslim conquest. That the mere proximity to Islam did

not initiate an immediate response to the subject of Islam among the Spaniards is explained by Kenneth Baxter Wolf: “Concerned about the protection of their own people from the potentially polluting effects of their proximity to Christianity,” the Muslim rulers managed to erect barriers between the Muslim minority and the Christian majority, which resulted in a high degree of autonomy for the Christian community. Unaffected by the encroachment of Islam, the Spanish Christians were rather silent about the religion of their rulers (285-86). But, the segregation of the two communities did not last for long, and an increased process of assimilation resulted in arousing the Christians’ fears of absorption into the much more sophisticated Islamic society and its advanced culture. “By the eighteenth century,” Wolf explains, “the perception of a passive but steady Islamic encroachment was strong enough to prompt Spanish ecclesiastics to address for the first time the problem of Islam as a rival religious phenomenon.” The waxing tide of conversion to Islam and the relentless process of acculturation were felt by some Church leaders to endanger the very presence of Christianity in Spain. Attracted to emulate the Islamic lifestyle, the Spanish Christians even “dressed like Muslims, spoke like Muslims, and lived like Muslims” (287). Lamenting the cultural hegemony of Islam, the ninth century Cordovan writer Paul Alvarus vehemently pronounces this discontent:

My fellow-Christians delight in the poems and romances of the Arabs; they study the works of Mohammedan theologians and philosophers, not in order to refute them, but to acquire a correct and elegant Arabic style. Where today can a layman be found who reads the Latin Commentaries on Holy Scriptures? Who is there that studies the Gospels, the Prophets, the Apostles? Alas, the young Christians who are most conspicuous for their talents have no knowledge of any literature or language save the Arabic; they read and study with avidity Arabian books; they amass whole libraries of them at a vast cost, and they everywhere sing the praises of Arabian lore. On the other hand, at the mention of Christian books they disdainfully protest that such works are unworthy of their notice. The pity of it! Christians have forgotten their own tongue, and scarce one in a thousand can be found able to compose in fair Latin a letter to a friend! But when it comes to writing Arabic, how many there are who can express themselves in that language with the greatest elegance, and even compose verses which surpass in form correctness those of the Arabs themselves! (qtd. in Dozey 268)

The fear of assimilation that would result in the total loss of the Spanish Christian identity accounts for the dissatisfaction among such scholars as Alvarus and was the basis for the hostile reaction against the Islamic existence in Spain that finally resulted in the *Reconquista*, the series of campaigns that eventually led to the re-institution of the Christian rule in Spain in 1492.

This anti-Muslim spirit grew in intensity until it produced the Cordovan Martyrs' Movement that started in 850 and continued for a decade. A discussion between some Muslims and a Christian priest named Perfectus was the spark that started the rebellion. When the Muslims asked him about his opinion of Jesus and Muhammad, Perfectus, initially reticent, was dragged into an unreserved defamation of the Prophet. Reluctant to retract his insults of the Prophet in front of the judge, Perfectus was sentenced to death. Between 850 and 860, fifty other Christians were executed for their public defamation of the Prophet. Intentionally seeking death by challenging the Muslim authorities, they were considered by many of their co-religionists as martyrs.

The Martyrs' Movement was instrumental in erecting “an impenetrable wall of violence and hatred between Muslim ruler and Christian subject” (Tolan, *Saracens* 88). The movement also caused a rift within the Christian community itself, most of which were not sympathetic with it. Although the martyrs were condemned by a group of the church leaders, they found such supporters as Paul Alvarus and Eulogius, who tried to get the most out of the intense situation to create a hostile public view of Islam and an aggressive attitude towards the Muslims. “The martyrs were clearly unpopular with Cordoba’s Christians,” Tolan argues; “indeed much of Eulogius’s and Alvarus’s energy was directed at convincing their fellow Christians of the sanctity of the martyrs and the evilness of the Muslim authorities” (*Saracens* 89). But most Cordovans rejected the notion of martyrdom. Although Christians were not persecuted and were free to practice their religion, the Cordovan rebels managed “openly and unprovokedly to insult the religion of the Muslims and blaspheme their prophet, with the deliberate intention of incurring the penalty of death” (Arnold 141).

Unlike the Spanish chroniclers who merely described the events of the Islamic conquest of Iberia without any attempt at explaining its significance or describing the faith of the invaders, Alvarus and Eulogius were well-informed of the Islamic culture and religion and tried to formulate a theological response that proved of great impact on the thinking of Islam in the rest of Europe. For both Alvarus and Eulogius, Islam portended the coming of Antichrist. They found evidence for the equivalence between Muhammad and Antichrist in the *Book of Daniel* and the *Book of Revelation*. That the Prophet died, according to their computations, in 666, the number associated with the beast in the *Book of Revelation*, proved that he was the beast described in the Bible, whose appearance was a prelude to the end of the world. It is noteworthy that Eulogius and Alvarus, who lived among Muslims, did not consult any Islamic sources or the Qur'an.

In addition to the image of the prophet of Islam as Antichrist, Alvarus and Eulogius, in their effort to provoke their community against the Muslim authorities, endeavoured to propagate a negative image of the Muslims and Arabs that emphasized their difference and wickedness. The basic ingredients of that image were cruelty and lust. The violent nature of the Muslims, according to Eulogius,

comes from the teachings of the Prophet, who “ordered his believers to take up arms in his behalf, and, as if with a new zeal of faith, he ordered them to cut down their adversaries with the sword” (qtd. in Tolan, *Saracens* 94).

The negative views of Islam evolving out of the Spanish Martyrs’ Movement and represented by the writings of Alvarus and Elogius were extremely influential in shaping the European view of Islam during the Middle Ages, helping rouse the spirit of the Crusades of the eleventh century. Muslims as the cruel enemy was at the heart of the message that the Mosarabs passed to the other Europeans. It is strange enough that the distorted views of Islam produced by the Spanish writers were expressed by people who lived among Muslims and should have known better about their culture and their religion. Quinn rightly asks: “How could so many Spanish Christian commentators hold on to such inadequate information when they lived in the midst of an active and generally tolerant Islamic population?” (30). Southern answers that “If they knew nothing of Islam as a religion, it is because they wished to know nothing” (25).

The medieval Spanish epic *El Cid*, 1150, revolves around the warfare between the Christians and the Moors of Spain. The historical El Cid, or Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar (c. 1043 - 1099), also named El Campeador, was named El Cid, Arabic *As-sid* or the Master, by his Arab admirers. The real El Cid was a mere adventurer who sought booty and fought against Christians as well as against Muslims for plunder, no more than a mercenary in the army of the Muslim state of Saragossa between 1081 and 1086 before he embarked upon fashioning his independent principality (Collins 26). In 1094, he succeeded in establishing his own kingdom in Valencia.

While the biography of historical El Cid is a mixture of fact and fiction, the legendary El Cid, on the other hand, is mythologized as the brave hero of the Spanish wars of liberation against the Muslim Moors and a symbol of the endeavour to reclaim the Christian identity in Spain. The image of Muslims in medieval Iberian literature contributed to promoting the negative perceptions of the Muslims; in the legend, the typically fearful Muslims suffer defeat and humiliation at the hands of the valiant Christian warrior, and while the Muslims in the epic are depicted as cowardly, treacherous, cruel, greedy, and barbaric, the Christians are brave, honest, and generous.

The Cid in the poem, as Norman Daniel notes, was “no Crusader; his motive is the honour, rather than the extension, of Christendom” (*Arabs* 81). As the wars against the Muslims in Spain preceded the Crusades, it contributed to the crusading zeal of the eleventh century. It was in the twelfth century that the *Reconquista* was incorporated into the Crusades in the East. Written at a time when the Iberian wars with the Muslims were regarded as part of the Crusades, the adventures in *El Cid* are styled as part of the Crusading effort.

God's Warriors: The Crusades and Its Literature

An outcome of the negative and hostile picture of Islam forged by the Mosarabs was the rise of anti-Islamic sentiments and the growing perception of the threat of Islam, the enemy that needed to be countered. The military response to the formidable challenge of Islam that started in the eleventh century came to be known as the Crusades. The first Crusade was launched in 1095, when Pope Urban II appealed to European kings and princes to take up the cross and gather forces to recapture the holy land from the infidel Muslims. A series of Crusades followed, and the eventual outcome was the complete failure of the European powers. A plethora of negative stereotypical views of Islam and Muslims evolving out of the historical circumstances during the Middle Ages are scattered in the historical accounts of the Crusades and the writings of contemporary theologians and were depicted and widely disseminated by the popular literary forms of the period.

Out of the bitter enmity, mistrust, and fear of the Muslim enemy that constituted the background to the Crusades, a huge bulk of offensive material gathered around the character of the Prophet, the Muslims, and about the subject of Islam. The main idea about the religion of the Saracens, especially during the first and second Crusades is that they were pagans who worshipped Muhammad along with other idols. This was the picture propagated by the chronicles of the early Crusades, especially the first and second, before the Crusaders came to admit that Muslims actually prayed to only one god. This was also the European public view found in the Romances and liturgical drama. In the *Chansons de geste*, epics glorifying the exploits of Charlemagne and the valour of his Christian knights in their wars against their Saracen enemies, the Muslims are portrayed as a despicable race of idolaters. A cluster of physical and cultural traits manage to establish a discourse of difference between Europeans and pagan Saracens, validating the extermination of the latter. It is noteworthy that the idea of conversion, present in various degrees in the early medieval texts, did not figure out as a realistic solution to the problem of Islam before the thirteenth century; “early crusaders,” as Sharon Kinoshita rightly observes, “showed little interest in proselytizing; not until the thirteenth century, with the emergence of the mendicant orders, did the Latin church make concerted attempt at mission” (86). The conversion of some Muslim fictional characters or the total conversion of all Muslims, however, remains an attractive option in imaginative writings as we see frequently in the romances.

The romance as a literary form, it has been suggested, might have emerged as a result of the contact between Saracen and Crusader (Heffernan 1). The French romance *Chanson de Roland* (Song of Roland), 1100, is the earliest and the most famous representative of the French medieval epics. It recounts the wars between the Christians under the leadership of Charlemagne and the Muslims of Spain. The historical setting of the *Song of Roland* is a campaign in Spain led by Charlemagne, king of the Franks in 778. On its return, the army was attacked by the Basques in

the valley of Roncesvaux. Legendary material gradually accrued around the actual historical events until by the end of the eleventh century, a completely different version of the original accounts evolved into the famous French epic, in which the Basques are replaced by the Saracens, and Hrodland, a soldier of uncertain historical authenticity is turned into the mythological hero Roland, engaged in a seven-year holy war with the pagan Saracens. The epic concentrates on the heroic exploits of the fictional hero Roland in fighting the treacherous Saracens and concludes with the forcible conversion of the Muslims and the triumph of the Christian forces. In the context of the Crusades, the original incidents are subjected to the demands of the war propaganda. Mark Dominik notes that the *Song of Roland* “gives religious significance to secular acts, appropriating the campaign of 778 not only as a holy war but as war between God and Satan” (2). Written around the time of Pope Urban II’s call for launching a crusade at the Council of Clermont in 1095, the *Song of Roland* was a fitting literary companion to the Pope’s speech, a reminder of a heroic past and a stimulator of religious feelings.

The Saracens of the Chansons de Geste bear no relation to the Saracens of reality, as many of those romances were most probably written down by the time of the First Crusade and were thus a vehicle of stimulating the Christians into fighting. The poets of the old French epics adopted a series of false conventions in relation to the Saracens’ traits and customs and to their religion that C. Meredith Jones finds difficulty in believing that they could have ever been accepted as truthful representations of Islam (201). Jones refuses to attribute the caricature depiction of the Muslims to mere ignorance on the grounds that the medieval epic poets should have been knowledgeable about Islam through a multiplicity of sources, including pilgrimage, commercial relations, first-hand contacts with Muslims in Spain, and long-term relations between Muslims and Crusaders in the Levant. According to Jones, the falsified portrait of the heathen Muslims is “a monument to an intense religious fervour … It was the crusades which made necessary the encouraging of hatred and contempt for the Saracen” (203). The resultant image is “a combination of ignorance and willful misrepresentation” (209). The degrading of the enemies and demonizing them was the Church’s main strategy to enlist the support of the Christians in the holy war against the Muslims. Leona F. Cordery argues that the propaganda material in medieval literature even outweigh the role of the Church leaders in instigating anti-Saracen feelings, making it “the epitome of religious bigotry and racial prejudice” (88). To the purpose of propaganda, there is added an element of entertainment derived from the imaginative accounts and exotic descriptions of the Saracens, as Cordery points out:

These numerous depictions of fantastic peoples are an indication that the authors want to show a completely different world, an exotic world compared to that of England. First, it allows the authors personal flights of fancy, a kind of creative writing, and secondly it is entertaining for the au-

dience. One should note that even real travellers like, for example, Marco Polo were given to bogus and exaggerated descriptions of the East. (91)

The elements of the medieval image of the Muslims included all types of falsehoods about their religion, their religious practices, their racial characteristics, and their social customs, intimating their diabolical lineage and highlighting their enmity to Christians. The identity markers of the Saracens were not thus exclusively cultural or religious; the Saracens were racially differentiated from the Franks in the *Song of Roland* and other romances. Cordery shows how medieval literary works helped establish the “otherness” of the Saracens by highlighting the physical and character differences between them and the Europeans. The bizarre descriptions of the Saracens in medieval literature confirm their physical inferiority, which corresponds to their spiritual inferiority. In most of the romances, the Saracens are depicted as black, ugly giants; hence, for the audience, they were easily conceived as “children of the devil” (94). Jones describes the traditional picture of Muslims as presented in the *Chansons de Geste*:

Saracens are evil people, they spend their lives at hating and mocking at Christ and in destroying His churches. They are the children of the author of all evil, the Devil; like their ancestors, they hate God and are constantly placing themselves under the protection of Satan ... they are frequently presented as physical monstrosities; many of them are giants, whole tribes have horns on their heads, others are black as devils. They rush into battle making weird noises comparable to the barking of dogs. They are intensely emotional and excitable people, readily giving way to tears of joy and anger, always going from one emotional extreme to another. Socially, they are the embodiment of all foul practices, simply because they lack the one thing necessary in Christian eyes for perfection – belief in Christianity. Thus they use slaves, they eat their prisoners, they buy and sell their womenfolk; and they practice polygamy. (204)

The Saracens are depicted as idolatrous pagans, the worshippers of a trinity of gods: Mohammed, Apollo, and Tervagant. Often, in the romances, as well as in the mystery plays, Muhammad is the main idol of the Saracens, presiding over a pantheon of lesser gods including Jupiter, Juno, Mars, Plato, Margot, and even Alkaron, or Al-Koran. In the literature of the period, the name of the Prophet is corrupted into Mahound, Mahoun, Mahomet, or Mammet. In French, he is Ma-hon, and in German, Machmet. The word Maumet, one of the corrupted forms of the name, eventually came to acquire the meaning of an idol or a false god. As the chief god of the Saracens, the heathen Saracens in the *Song of Roland* invoke his name and seek his aid. Marsile, the Saracen king is shown to pray to Appolin and Mahumet at the beginning of the epic:

*Marsile its king, who feareth not God's name,
Mahumet's man, he invokes Apollin's aid,
Nor wards off ills that shall to him attain. (7-9)*

As they march to the battle, the Saracen pagans raise “Mahumet’s” idol upon a high tower, bending and praying to him (853-54). The idols of the Saracens are made of silver, gold, or precious stones. The Saracens invoke the aid of their idols, sing hymns to them; but after their defeat, knowing their worthlessness, they knock them down and destroy them; the Saracens are always defeated in the romances. Queen Bramimunde, wife of Marsile, admits that the idols of the Saracens are ineffectual:

*Says Bramimunde: “Great foolishness I hear:
Those gods of ours in cowardice are steeped;
In Rencesval they wrought an evil deed,
Our chevaliers they let be slain in heaps;
My lord they failed in battle, in his need,
Never again will he his right hand see; (2715-20)*

After defeat, the Saracens, in a symbolic gesture signifying their destruction, they, in their rage, destroy their idols:

*Then Apollin in's grotto they surround,
And threaten him, and ugly words pronounce:
“Such shame on us, vile god!, why bringest thou?
This is our king; wherefore dost him confound?
Who served thee oft, ill recompense hath found.”
Then they take off his scepter and his crown, With their hands
hang him from a column down,
Among their feet trample him on the ground,
With great cudgels they batter him and trounce.
From Tervagant his carbuncle they impound,
And Mahumet into a ditch fling out,
Where swine and dogs defile him and devour.
(2581-92)*

The overall message of the *Song of Roland*, that “Pagans are wrong: Christians are right indeed” (1015), Roland’s rallying cry, is thus put across by showing that while the Christians are on the side of God, the pagan Saracens are the enemies of God, the worshippers of false idols.

Such was the strength and persistence of the idea of the Saracens as pagans that the pagans of antiquity as well as the medieval European pagans, like the

Saxons, were described as Saracens; the word “Saracen” came to be used as a synonym for “pagan.” According to Tolan, “for many Western Europeans throughout the Middle Ages, Saracens were pagans, and pagans were Saracens: the two words become interchangeable” (*Saracens* 128). In the mystery plays of the fourteenth century, we still find such people as Pharaoh, Herod, Julius Caesar, and Pilate worshipping Mahound. Strangely enough, the idea of Muhammad as an idol, Smith notes, persisted to the seventeenth century, especially in dramatic literature, in the teeth of all information telling that the Muslims were not idolaters (2-3).

The persistence of the prevalent medieval view of Muslims as pagans despite all evidence otherwise is an astonishing cultural phenomenon. The set of ideas about Islam in the West during the Middle Ages, R. W. Southern comments, “belong less to the history of Western thought about Islam than to the history of the Western imagination” (29). It is true that during the Middle Ages and most of the Renaissance, writers on Islam continued to draw on second-hand sources and often on their own imagination to fill the gaps in their already flawed and deficient knowledge about Islam and the life of its adherents, presenting totally false and biased accounts of the nature of the religion, the character of its prophet, and the practices of Muslims, but it remains also true that the elements of this image were disproved by some who tried to search for the truth from more reliable sources or even by the Crusaders themselves when they settled down in the Levant and discovered that the Muslims were actually monotheists and that they were not like the savages depicted in European chronicles of the Crusades and propagandistic crusading literature. Without diminishing the factor of ignorance – because many were really ignorant – it seems that the shocking image of the brutal, blood-thirsty, licentious, and idolatrous Saracens was more the result of prejudice than of ignorance: creating a hideous image of Muslims suited the needs of political propaganda and was necessary to justify the Crusades. The “view of the pagan other,” Tolan comments, could be used to “justify war against Saracen ‘pagans’;” in addition, “their paganism and barbarism were a necessary foil to the steadfast devotion of the crusaders/apostles” (*Saracens* 108 and 112). Norman Daniel sums up the reasons behind the popularity of the idea:

It has always been perceived, even by its enemies, that the essential message of Islam is to proclaim the unity of God ... Educated medieval writers fully understood this, although there were poets who spoke of the worship of Muhammad, and of other idols, probably because they were not concerned with facts at all; there were soldiers who fed their hate by believing that their enemies were idolatrous; occasionally there were serious writers who knew better but carelessly repeated false or exaggerated statements ... even those who knew Muhammad to have believed that he was sent primarily to call the Arabs from polytheism did not greatly stress this. (40)

In addition to the false idea about Muslims as pagans, a huge bulk of legends also accumulated around the character of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam. Some of these legends were forcibly implanted into the Western public mind and managed to persist to relatively recent times. Discrediting the prophet of Islam and defaming his character were essential for dismissing his claim to prophethood. The life of Muhammad, Norman Daniel remarks, “was seen as an essential disproof of the Islamic claim to revelation. It was often treated as the most important disproof of all” (79). All kinds of false charges were thus heaped upon him with the aim of smearing his personal life and disqualifying him. For Latin polemicists, Muhammad’s inability to perform miracles or to predict the future was a good reason for them to conclude that he was not a true prophet. Other accusations were invented for the purpose of refuting his claim and demolishing the religious structure based upon it; consequently, Muhammad was considered a false prophet. Another prevalent medieval view of the prophet of Islam was to see him as a heretic Christian and Islam as a Christian heresy, the same view that prevailed among Eastern and Byzantine polemicists.

While the image of Muslims as pagan idolaters was the image that appealed most to the commons, for the theologians Islam was primarily a heresy. The first view was the product of military confrontation; the second was the result of the theological clash between the two faiths. Tolan elaborates on the distinction between the theological image of Islam, espoused by the learned clergy, and the “popular” image:

It is tempting to brand the Saracen idolater as the imagined enemy of the knightly layman while seeing the heresiarch Muhammad as the fruit of the theological hostility of the clerical class. The paganism of the song of Roland would be the “popular” image of Islam, whereas the heresy of Muhammad would be the learned image.

However, as Tolan adds, the distinction between the popular opinion and the clerical view is not that simple: in the clerical outlook of the Latin chroniclers of the Crusades, the Saracen enemies were pagan idolaters (*Saracens* 136).

Knowledge about Muhammad during the Middle Ages consisted of either vague and distorted facts, based on authentic Islamic texts, or totally fabricated material without any historical foundation. The authentic biographical facts available to medieval scholars were changed to suit the purpose of creating an image of the Prophet as an imposter. While the Latin polemics remained confined to scholarly circles, the literary works based on them guaranteed a much wider audience. The collection of scornful legends that Latin polemicists created and passed to the poets and dramatists were repeated over and over again and accepted without scrutiny for centuries to come. The French Dominican encyclopedist Vincent of Beauvais (d. 1264), gathered all the legendary material about Muhammad known to his time in his *Speculum Historiale* (c. 1250).

Examples of legends based on authentic facts can be seen in how Muhammad's early poverty and orphan state gave rise to the legend of his low birth and, later, to the legend of his slavery in his youth. From this legend of base birth, some Renaissance writers developed the story that his mother was a Jewess, perhaps to account for the Jewish elements in Islam. According to this legend, Muhammad's marriage to Khadijah opened to him a world of opportunities; until his marriage to his wealthy benefactress, Muhammad lived a life of destitution and unimportance.

Muhammad was also depicted as a capable magician and necromancer, who used his magical powers to deceive his followers by performing false miracles. Using his magic, he convinced Khadijah, or the queen of Corozan, as she was named by John Lydgate, to marry him; as a result of this marriage, he became king of his people. In these stories, Muhammad's learning of magic furnishes Islam with its alleged diabolical nature as well as serves to explain the Prophet's great success and the big following he received.

Stories of Muhammad's fake miracles were repeated by medieval and Renaissance authors to accentuate his picture as a deceiver. The stories tell of a dove that Muhammad trained to pick grain from his ear to make people think that it talked to him, simulating the Holy Ghost. Another story tells of a bull that the Prophet trained to eat from his hand. Then the bull comes to him, the Qur'an around his neck, and kneels down to the Prophet, who takes the Qur'an and announces to his people the divine origin of the book. In other versions of the story, the bull is replaced by a camel.

A very popular legend about Muhammad was that he suffered from epilepsy and that he invented the visitations by Gabriel to account for his state during his epileptic fits to cover up his infirmity. Again, this legend is an example of the deliberate distortions of the Muslim traditions aiming at discrediting the Prophet and denigrating Islam. From the Muslim sources, we know that the Prophet suffered during receiving the revelation and that he sweated and sometimes fell to the ground. Moreover, Muhammad's explanation of the fits is cited as an example of his cunning and how he managed to put one of the most embarrassing attributes of his personality to good use (Smith 6).

The story of Sergius was one of the most persistent legends used to undermine the Qur'anic revelation and Muhammad's prophethood. This legend, which persisted even beyond the time of the Renaissance, originates from the story of Bahira in the Muslim traditions. In keeping with the view of Islam as a Christian heresy, starting among the Eastern Christians, the legend tells that this Nestorian monk instructed Muhammad in the Scriptures and inspired him into assuming prophethood. The Qur'an, according to this story, is the work of Sergius or that Muhammad wrote it with his assistance. In other versions of the story, a Jewish scribe collaborated with Muhammad, becoming the source of the Jewish elements in the Qur'an.

A mass of ridiculous literature, employing very offensive graphic details, abounds around the ignominious death and burial of the prophet of Islam. According to one story, Muhammad was attacked and devoured by pigs while intoxicated or during an epileptic fit. This story was used to explain the prohibition of wine and pork in Islam. In another story, he was poisoned by his followers who tried to test the authenticity of his claim at prophethood. Norman Daniel remarks that the very fact that Muhammad died, unlike Christ, who had risen to Heaven, was accentuated by medieval authors (102). The place of Muhammad's burial was given as Makkah, where his floating coffin, which was believed to be suspended in air inside the "Temple of Makka," was visited by Saracen pilgrims.

Apart from the political and ideological factors that account for the image of Islam as the formidable political enemy and the arch religious rival of Christendom, other economic and cultural factors contributed to the emergence during the Middle Ages of alternative positive images of the Muslim world. The hostile picture of Muslims engendered by the Crusades was not the sole aspect of the medieval image of Islam. Admiration for Muslim learning and civilization was a major theme in writings about Muslims and Arabs. The influence of Arabic knowledge and its contribution to the revival of learning in Europe through such cultural centers in Spain and Sicily can hardly be contested. Arabia as the birthplace of the greatest and most wide-ranging philosophers was a recurrent strain in medieval thinking of Arabs and Muslims. The Saracens were often seen as "a nation of philosophers" or occasionally, 'philosophers' came to be synonymous with 'Muslims' (Rodinson 16). These less negative and more realistic representations however were obscured by the more widely-acceptable imaginary and legendary perceptions of the evil foe that arose out of the military confrontation; "borrowing from Muslim culture did not presuppose approval of it" (Bihasa 17). Even during the Crusades, the direct contact of the crusaders with Muslims attested to the wrongness of their deep-seated convictions about Muslims. Moreover, the commercial contacts that existed during that time provided them with firsthand experience that totally contradicted with their preconceptions of the idolatrous brutal Saracens.

The repugnant image of Muhammad popularized by the major medieval vernacular literary works was more the work of sick imagination than the result of any search for reliable information. Denigrating the Prophet by presenting the ugliest possible portrait of him, in order to frighten Christians of the danger of Islam, was the paramount motive of those writers and the overriding principle that governed their works.

Literature of the Late Middle Ages

One flagrant example of extreme grotesqueness in portraying the Prophet can be seen in *The Divine Comedy* (1310) by the Italian poet Dante Alighieri (d.1321), a very popular work of the early Renaissance and one of the masterpieces of Western literature. Dante's work, considered by some to have been influenced by Muslim accounts of the *Mir'raj*, takes the reader in a virtual journey to Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven. In the *Inferno*, Muhammad and his cousin Ali are among those who are punished for sowing the seeds of discord and schism. Muhammad's crime refers to the view that considered him as a heretic Christian whose heresy caused a rift in the body of the Christian Church, rather than the founder of a new faith. The enormity of Muhammad's crime is shown by the extremely repulsive description of his punishment in the eighth circle of Hell; he is split through his face and body for splitting the unity of mankind (XXVIII, 35). Even other Muslims like the philosophers Avicenna and Averoes, and Saladin, the formidable foe of the Crusaders, deserved a milder punishment; they are placed in the first circle of Hell with the virtuous pagans such as Socrates and Plato, whose virtues do not suffice because they did not have baptism, not at the bottom of Hell as Muhammad and his companion Ali.

The *Travels* of Sir Henry Mandeville was translated into many European languages after its appearance in Anglo-Norman French in 1356-57. This very popular book supposedly recounts the author's journeys in the East, but it is actually a compilation drawn from various sources including *Speculum Historiale* of Vincent de Beauvais. Although the real identity of the author is dubious and the travels are seen now to be mere fantastic inventions, it still remains that the book was immensely authoritative as a reference for many centuries. Feigning the authority of an insider, Mandeville keeps reminding his Christian readers that Muslims are the usurpers of the Christian holy places he described in the book. In his image of Muhammad, he repeats the legend of epilepsy and Muhammad's claim of divine revelation through the angel Gabriel to cover up his infirmity. Accounting for the similarities between Islam and Christianity, Mandeville refers to Sergius, the Christian hermit whom Muhammad met in his way to Egypt as the source of Muhammad's doctrines. The high position of the Virgin Mary and Jesus in the Qur'an makes the author believe that it would be easy to convert Muslims to Christianity.

Mandeville describes the court of the Sultan of Egypt as an example of the immorality and degeneracy of the Saracens. The picture Mandeville draws of the Sultan's tyranny, lust, and cruelty are also reminders to the readers that these qualities are to be traced back to Muhammad, the archetype of carnality and lust for power. The sensual descriptions of the Qur'anic Paradise heighten the sense of the wickedness and sensuality of the Prophet and his followers.

In the allegorical work, *Piers Plowman*, published in 1362, by the English poet

William Langland (1333-1386), Muhammad is associated with Antichrist and described as a Christian heretic. although, as Metlitz claims, Langland's view of Islam and its Prophet represented the most liberal opinion in the medieval outlook on the religion of the Saracens" (197), acknowledging Islam as a monotheistic religion and admitting that Muslims believe in the one almighty God, the creator, though their law is different from the Christian law; Langland still concurs with the hostile views of his time. On the one hand, Muslims believe in and love the same one God of Jews and Christians:

*Lewes, Gentiles, and Sarrasines. Iugan hem-salue
That leelicha thei by-leyuen . and zut here lawe dyuerseth;
And on god that al by-gan . and goode herte thai honouret,
And either loueth, and bileyith . in on lord al-myzt.
(C: XVIII, 132-35)*

And like Christians, Muslims may be saved in virtue of this belief and love:

*And so may Sarasenes be sauued . scribes and Jewes;
Alias thanne! but owre loresmen . lyuen as thei leren vs,
And, for her lyuynge, that lowed men . be the lother god aulten.
For Sarasenes han somewhat semyng to owre bileyue,
For thei loue and bileyue . in o persone almijty;
And we, lerid and lewede . in on god bileyueth.
(B: XV, 383-88)*

On the other hand, Langland repeats some of the commonplace medieval ideas about the prophet of Islam. According to one of those legends that Langland repeats in his book, Muhammad was an ambitious cardinal who, disappointed for not being elected pope, deserts Rome into Syria and establishes a new Christian sect:

*Ac one Makometh, a man . in mysbileue
Brouzte Sarasenes of Surre . and se in what manere.
This Makometh was a Crystcne man . and for he mosite
nouzte be a pope,
In-to Surre he souzte . and thorw his sotil wittes
Daunted a dowue . and day and nyzte hir fedde;
The corne that she cropped . he caste it in his ere.
And if he amonge the people preached . or in places come,
Thanne wolde the coluer come . to the clerkes ere,
Menyng as after meet . thus Makometh hir enchaunted,
And dide folke thanne falle on knees . for he swore in*

*His prechynge,
That the coluer that come so . come fram god of heuene
As messenger to Makometh . men forto teche
And thus thow wyles of his witte . and a whyte dowue,
Makometh in mysbileue . men and wommen brouzete.
That lered there and lewed zit . lyuen on his lawes.
And sith owre saueoure suffred . the Sarasenes so bigiled,
Thow a crystene clerke . accursed in his soule;
(B: XV, 389-405)*

Langland uses the term Antichrist to represent all false prophets or even corrupted churchmen; the evil spirit of Antichrist resides in all those who forsake the path of salvation in preference of worldly pleasures and gains. As such, Muhammad, the servant of Satan, who led the heathens away from the path of salvation, is the forerunner of Antichrist. As an agent of corruption, Muhammad is associated with Lady Meed, a personification of greediness and the corruptive power of riches that have infected all levels of society and especially the clergy. As such, she is the adversary of the good lady, the Holy Church. According to the apocalyptic vision of the poem, at the end of time, Lady Meed, along with Muhammad, will be vanquished, and the Jews and Muslims will be converted:

*And er this fortune falle . fynde men shal the worste,
By syx sonnes and a schippe . and half a shef of arwes;
And the myddel of a mone . shal make the lewes to torne,
And saracenes for that sijte . shulle synge gloria in excelsis,
For Makomct and Mede . myshappe shal that tyme;
For, melius est bonum nomen quam diuicie mulled
(B: III, 323-27)*

Muhammad, in Langland's view, was thus a corrupted Christian who was tempted by his worldly ambition and avarice and his lust for power into forsaking Christianity and starting his heresy. He was thus a culprit in leading his people astray from the right path of Christianity. As such, he was an embodiment of Antichristian evil. It should be noted that the role Muhammad is assigned in *Piers Plowman* is actually to accentuate and exemplify Langland's main objective, to criticize the corrupted clergymen, whose corruption dissuades Christians from the right path, rather than guide them towards salvation. In spite of its negative attitude towards the Prophet, *Piers Plowman* remains comparatively more tolerant than the mainstream views of the Prophet and Muslims. Capable of acknowledging the similarities between Christianity and Islam and their acceptance of the same God leads into the conviction that Saracens could be converted and eventually saved. The way Islam and Muhammad serve in the larger scheme of Langland's ecclesiasti-

cal satire of greed and covetousness bears resemblance to other contemporary writings and anticipates future orientalist works, which reflect their authors' preoccupation with internal European concerns and whose indictment of Islam is an indirect condemnation of social and political ills of national concern.

In the *Canterbury Tales*, Geoffrey Chaucer (c.1342 - 1400) makes many allusions to fourteenth-century Crusades, including the unsuccessful Alexandria campaign led by king Peter of Cyprus in 1365. By the time of the *Canterbury Tales*, both the Crusades and missionary efforts have proven a complete failure in uprooting Islam. The *Man of Law's Tale* exemplifies this feeling of the futility of the crusading efforts and the uselessness of attempts to convert Muslims. Constance is the daughter of the Roman Emperor, whose legendary qualities, reaching the ears of the Sultan of Syria, make him determined to win her in marriage, even if this means to change his religion and to relinquish Jerusalem for the Christians, since it is forbidden for a Christian woman to marry a Muslim:

*By-cause that ther was swich diversitee
Bitwene hir bothe lawes, that they sayn,
They trowe 'that no cristien prince wolde fayn
Wedden his child under oure lawes swete
That us were taught by Mahoun our prophete. (220-24)*

Although Constance finds it too harsh and cruel for her parents to agree to send her to the land of the "barbarous" Saracens, she accepts her fate with saintly stoicism and sees herself as a means of winning people to Christianity. The Sultans' conversion results in the conversion of his people, except for his own mother, along with her attendants, who hides her faith and schemes to murder her son and all other Christians during the wedding banquet, sparing only the life of the bride, whom she casts adrift on a rudderless ship. The Sultaness' act of opposition, springing from her resolve to save her faith and her country, brings about the narrator's wrath, who lashes out at her, describing her as the paragon of wickedness, and a "welle of vices" [well of vices]:

*O sowdanesse, roote of iniquitee,
Virago, thow Semyrame the secounde,
O serpent under femininitee,
Lyk to the serpent depe in helle ybounde!
O feyned womman, al that may confounde
Vertu and innocence, thurgh thy malice,
Is bred in thee, as nest of every vice! (358-64)*

Constance is miraculously saved and is finally reunited with her father. Constance's brief failed union with the Sultan which is "the only encounter with Is-

lam in the story” (Lewis, Celia 364), symbolizes the failure of realizing a similar resolution in reality. While Constance’s role can be seen to represent the possibility of winning the Muslim East by conversion, her expulsion from Syria marks the collapse of this option. The Sultaness’ violent reaction to the mass conversion in Syria reflects the strong Islamic opposition to the European missionary and crusading endeavours. In the words of Celia M. Lewis,

the movements of Custance from Rome to Syria and eventually back to Rome, from bridal missionary to violently expulsed Christian, reflect the failed European impulse to reclaim the Holy Land through conversion, and the crusades that followed. Together with the historical allusions in the portrait of the model-crusader Knight, the fictional story of Custance challenges the fantasy of Middle Eastern conquest. The *Canterbury Tales*’ confrontation with this Christian hope and ambition signals what for Chaucer’s readers must have been a troubling awareness: neither through violence nor through more peaceful means of invasion will Islam be conquered. (354)

The marriage theme was a recurrent literary trope in medieval literature involving Christians vis-à-vis Muslims, usually standing for the possibility of achieving a peaceful settlement of the conflict between the two faiths. In the thirteenth-century romance of the *King of Tars*, one analogue and a possible influence on Chaucer’s tale, a Christian princess seemingly converts to Islam to save her people. Lillian Herlands Hornstein provides the following summary of the plot:

To spare her people further war, a self-sacrificing Christian princess marries a heathen sultan who has fallen in love with her upon hearing reports of her great beauty. When their offspring is born a formless lump of flesh, the father accuses the mother of hypocrisy in having merely pretended to believe in his gods. His pleas to the heathen deities fail to restore the child; when, however, at the request of the mother, the infant is baptized, it immediately becomes a handsome boy. Induced by this miracle to adopt the Christian faith, the father himself changes in the baptismal water, from black to white. It being no longer possible to keep his conversion secret, the sultan unites with his father-in-law to convert or kill those of his vassals who have not yet accepted Christianity. (433)

Notwithstanding the similarities between the *Man of Law’s Tale* and the *King of Tars*, Chaucer departs from the conventions of the romances in representing the Muslims. Whereas in the romances, Muslims are always idolaters, in Chaucer’s work, Muhammad, “Makomete,” as Chaucer calls him, is not a deity, but a prophet of God, receiving the holy laws of the Qur’an from Him:

‘Lordes,’ quod she, ‘ye knownen everichon,
How that my sone in point is for to lete
The holy lawes of our Alkaron,
Ye even by goddes message Makomete. (330-34)

Moreover, Chaucer does not dwell on the racial markers that distinguish the Saracens from the Franks or the English in the romances.

John Lydgate (1376 - 1451) describes Muhammad as a false prophet and magician who could deceive his people by the power of his magic. He repeats the stories of the dove that picks grain from his ear, simulating the Holy Ghost, the camel that carries the Qur'an, the legend of Muhammad's low birth, and his epilepsy. According to him, Muhammad studied the Bible in Egypt before he proclaimed himself prophet in Arabia. In *The Fall of Princes* (1440), Lydgate gives a very despicable account of the death of Muhammad. According to this vile story, Muhammad was eaten by a herd of swine as he was drunk.

The negative perceptions of Islam and the Prophet as expounded by the writings of Dante, Mandeville, Langland, and Lydgate were based on the Byzantine polemical literature and were fed by the armed conflict during the Crusades. However, along with the legendary material around which these writings were constructed, there also existed alternative views that can be seen to represent a different approach to Islam that is at least less inflammatory, less absurd, more peaceful, and somewhat more reasonable.

Knowledge for the Sake of Mission

It is noteworthy that peaceful co-existence of Islam and Christianity was not an option for medieval Europe during the Middle Ages; the problem of Islam was to be tackled through one of two approaches: war or conversion. Throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries, most people chose between either the Crusades as the proper answer to the Islamic threat or preaching the Muslims to convert them to Christianity. With the failure of the Crusades, the latter option became more popular. The effort of such scholars as Petrus Alfonsi, Peter the Venerable, Roger Bacon, and Raymond Lull represent the alternative approach to the Crusades.

Dialogues Against the Jews (1110), composed by Petrus Alfonsi (d. 1140), a Spanish Jew who had converted to Christianity, constitutes “the earliest account of Mahomet and his religion which has any objective value,” in the words of Southern. The explanation of the tenets of Islam in the book is “by far the best informed and most rational statement of the case in the twelfth century, and one of the best in the whole Middle Ages” (29). Alfonsi used his philosophical background to attack Judaism and Islam and to prove the truth of the Christian doctrine, showing that Muslims are not pagans although their monotheism is mixed with remnant

pagan elements. In addition to Sergius, Alfonis claims, a Jew also helped Muhammad in formulating his heresy.

Peter the Venerable (c. 1092 - 1156), abbot of the monastery of Cluny, was motivated by his zeal to defend the Christian doctrines against all heresies by means of the power of logic rather than by the armed force. Although he did not actually oppose the Crusades, yet his own project was to study Islam from its own sources. Peter's intention was to use knowledge, rather than force, to counter the challenge of Islamic heresy and to convert Muslims. In order to achieve that goal, he commissioned the translation of the Qur'an in 1143, in hope of abating ignorance about Islam. Robert of Ketton, the translator, rendered the first Latin translation of the Qur'an and the first translation into any Western language. In addition to the Qur'an, Peter commissioned the translation of a collection of other Arabic texts. This collection of Islamic texts known as the *Cluniac Corpus* provided the first basis for the serious study of Islam. Peter himself composed two treatises on Islam. While in the first, *The Summary of the Entire Heresy of the Saracens*, he summarizes the Islamic doctrine, in *The Refutation of the Sect or Heresy of the Saracens*, he undertakes the task of proving the falsity of Islam. Islam, Peter explains, is the summation of all heresies, combining the heretical views of Arius, Sabelius, Mani, and Nestorius, who tried to lead Christians away from the belief in the Trinity and in the divinity of Christ. In this diabolical endeavour, Muhammad prepared the way for Antichrist. Muhammad was helped by Sergius and several Jews in creating his heretical doctrines and writing the Qur'an. Apart from his negative views of Islam, Peter's rather rational approach and his peaceful outlook broke new ground in the medieval attitude towards Islam.

Like Peter the Venerable, Roger Bacon (c. 1214 - 1292), the English philosopher and statesman, believed in the failure of the Crusades and the futility of any military confrontation with Islam. Christianity could only be served by peaceful means. The best answer to the problem of Islam was to try to convert Muslims by philosophical and rational argumentation. The scientific refutation of Islam needs the study of Islamic beliefs and the learning of languages.

Raymond Lull (c. 1235 - 1326), like Roger Bacon, emphasized the necessity of understanding the habits and beliefs of the infidels and the learning of their languages as being at the heart of missionary activities among them. As a result of Bacon's and Lull's efforts, the Council of Vienna agreed in 1311 on teaching Arabic, Hebrew, Syriac, and Greek in four European universities: Paris, Oxford, Bologna, Avignon, and Salamanca, although the plan was not implemented.

The efforts of Peter the Venerable, Roger Bacon, and Raymond Lull to comprehend Islam and their preaching of peaceful campaigning against Muslims were not the dominant ways of thinking about Islam during the Middle Ages. Peter's rational approach and the method of philosophical argumentation developed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries by Alfonsi, Bacon, and Lull often gave way

to the more antagonistic attitudes that we find in such writings as those of Dante, Langland, Mandeville, and Lydgate.

In the period between the second half of the fourteenth century and the first half of the fifteenth century, however, the interest in Islam seems to have waned. With the fall of Acre in 1291, the Crusades came to an end, and the Christian West lost all hope of retrieving the Holy Land from the hand of Muslims. By the end of the fourteenth century, it became clear that the missionary movements to convert Muslims had failed conspicuously. Moreover, the internal theological strife within Christendom after the Reformation came to be more important than the external theological threat of Islam. The European kings and princes were also so mired in their internal political conflicts to think of any more collective military campaigns against the faraway Muslims. Islam thus ceased to represent the major intellectual and theological adversary. It was not before the Ottoman Turks started to impinge upon the European soil itself, threatening the European capitals in the fifteenth century that the problem of Islam came to dominate the European mind again. The anti-Muslim sentiments and ways of thinking about Islam during the Middle Ages proved however to be very crucial to determining the Western perceptions of Islam in the following centuries. The same accusations leveled against Islam and its prophet during the Middle Ages were recycled and reused repeatedly, and the image of the Muslim as the inferior other proved to be so deep-seated in the Western psyche that it continued to colour the Western attitude towards the world of Islam during the next centuries and to the present.

Terror of the World

The Renaissance and the Reformation

While interest in Islam declined during the second half of the fourteenth century and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries with the failure of the crusades, the Islamic challenge began to mount again with the rise of another Muslim race, the Ottoman Turks, to power. The crossing of the Dardanelles and capturing Gallipoli in 1354 signals the beginning of the Turkish presence in Europe. Other decisive battles secured the Ottoman control over southern Europe and the eastern Mediterranean. In 1453, the conquest of Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire was the culmination of the Ottoman victories. In 1529, the Ottomans lay siege to Vienna. Although The Ottoman expansion in Europe slowed after the defeat of the Ottoman navy in the battle of Lepanto in 1570, it was not completely stopped; the following year the Ottomans captured Cyprus, and their victories over Spain in 1574 and Portugal in 1578 and Venice in 1669 won them Tunis, morocco, and Crete. For almost three centuries, the Turkish threat caused great fear in Europe as the Ottomans continued to threaten the very heart of Europe.

The period also witnessed a growing interest in Persia, with which the Europeans, especially the English maintained more friendly relations. Geographically remote, the Persians, unlike the Turks, did not constitute a possible threat to Europe. Moreover, as the archenemy of the Ottomans, the Shiite Persians were perceived as possible allies of European powers. During the reign of Abbas I (1571 - 1629) of the Safavid dynasty (1501 - 1722), diplomatic and trade relations with European nations witnessed a considerable development, and a flux of travelers, especially French visited Persia.

As a result of the Turkish menace, a heightened preoccupation with Islam appears in the writings of European theologians, dramatists and poets. The success of the Ottomans raised a challenge for both Catholic and Protestant writers; theological explanations for the Turkish victories were needed, and preachers engaged themselves in the conflict, trying to interpret the confrontation in religious terms, to appease the rising fears of the populace, and to rally the European powers against the enemies. “Even the secularization of Europe from Renaissance times onward did not diminish this hostility to Islam,” as the eminent historian Bernard Lewis admits, adding that

It might have been expected that the revival of learning in Europe and the growth of scientific history would have brought about a more impartial view and a less prejudiced approach. In fact, they did not. Prejudice, as so often has been swollen by ignorance. (From Babel 116)

“Ill-will,” Lewis notes “usually outlives religious belief.” Indeed a great deal of malice and ill-feelings have blinded Western observers during the sixteenth century, marring the objectivity in their treatment of Islam and the Muslims. One of the early contributions to the knowledge about the Turks was Richard Knolles’ *General History of the Turks* (1603), considered to be the first attempt at a general history (Lewis, *Islam and the West* 72). Although Knolles did not know Turkish, he was able to draw upon the contemporary literature on the subject of the Ottomans that scattered in the several European languages that he knew. The general impression Knolles’ conveys in his book is that of the Turks’ barbarism and cruelty, and he voices the European sense of fear of Turks in his description of them as “the present terror of the world.”

Propagandist aims were largely behind the shaping of a fearful and repulsive image of the Turkish Muslims. The image of the licentious, cruel, and tyrant Turk acquired the negative associations of the medieval image of the Saracen. The term “Saracen” itself came to be replaced by the term “Turk” as representing and encompassing all Muslims. Unlike the consistently negative associations of the former, however, the term “Turk” acquired a great deal of complexity and inconsistency in its significance, matching the complex array of political, economic, and cultural factors that determined the European-Turkish relations. Feelings of fear mingled in European culture with those of admiration for the military feats, the economic power, and the civilizing advancements of the Ottomans. Lust and despotism, however, were the two main qualities ascribed to the Turk.

On way the Reformation influenced the European attitude towards Islam was that the internal religious strife became the paramount concern of the European powers. But as the Turks increasingly became a fearful military threat, the concern with Islam surfaced again, affecting even the religious debate between Catholics and Protestants. Catholics often likened the Protestant creeds to Islam and Protestants to Muslims. And the same charge of Islam was used by Protestants against Catholics. This association of Islam with an unorthodox form of Christianity is reminiscent of the medieval description of Islam as a Christian heresy. On the other hand, for the Protestants, the Pope of the Catholic Church became Antichrist. The Antichrist tradition developed in Spain and medieval Europe with respect to Islam and the Prophet Muhammad continued to be applied to the new enemy of Christianity. But under the impact of the Catholic-Protestant division, the Antichrist rhetoric was manipulated in the propagandistic war between the Catholics and Protestants. In most Protestant polemics, Catholicism or the Pope of Rome is identified with Antichrist. Islam came to be associated with Catholicism, and as both were the enemies of the Protestants, both were considered as types of Antichrist. Throughout the sixteenth century, the Catholics are often compared in cruelty and irreligion to the Turks.

To “turn Turk” was a common term that reflected the tendency among many Europeans in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to pursue fortunes and to

seek for better opportunities in the coasts of Barbary and in the ports of the Ottoman Levant. Thousand others were taken captive by the Ottomans and transported as slaves to Constantinople. Either tempted or compelled, many of them joined the Turks, became partners of the corsair pirates, or converted to Islam. The renegades resided in the world of Islam and prospered as they pursued many careers in the Ottoman Empire. They even served in the Ottoman navy and army; in a letter to the Pope in 1606, the Turkish Sultan boasted that he had 30,000 Christians in his army who “are the founders of our artillerie, and other Instruments of warre” and all of whom are “Renegados” fighting “in defence of our lawe, and with vs to conquer your country” (qtd. in Mater, *Renegade* 489). Conversion to Islam was a serious problem that troubled the Europeans that it figured prominently in dramatic works of the period. Apostasy for the sake of material advantages was depicted in these works as a heinous crime that entailed divine punishment; the renegade was regarded as a Faustian villain who sold his soul in exchange of worldly success.

The Lustful and Despotic Turk

Two dominant components of the European image of the Muslim Turk, as depicted by all types of writers, were those of lust and arbitrary rule. Eastern despotism was a general fault of all eastern nations, a distinctive mark setting them apart from the Europeans. Thus, several contemporary political philosophers, along with travelers and historians, commented on the political system of the Ottoman Empire, presenting it as the model of despotic government. Nicolo Machiavelli (1469 - 1527), in *The Prince*, was the first to compare between the monarchic system in Europe and the tyrannical rule of the Ottoman Empire: “All the Turkish monarchy is governed by one ruler, the others are his servants” (15). Jean Bodin, (1530 - 1596), the French lawyer and political theorist, was the major proponent of the divine rights of kings and of their sovereignty. Bodin included the Ottoman Empire along with France as commended examples of the absolute rule advocated. In *Six Books of the Commonwealth*, Bodin reiterates the old climactic approach to peoples’ characters and temperaments. Thus, Bodin claims that peoples of the north are more democratic, peoples of the south are more inclined to absolute rule, while peoples in middle regions, like France, are inclined to moderate in their systems of governance (Franklin 131). Such early observations helped establish the idea of the Muslim Orient as inherently despotic and opposed to Western democracy.

Along with despotism, lust was the other main vice associated in the European mind with the Turks. “Even more pervasive and persistent than the image of the capricious despot,” Bernard Lewis notes, is that of

the lustful and licentious Turk, whose alleged sexual prowess and practices

have been described in what has sometimes amounted to pornographic literature and art. Rampant sexuality was an old accusation leveled by Europeans against their eastern neighbors. Already in antiquity some Greek and Latin authors had made this point against the Saracens. The theme cropped up occasionally in Byzantine and Crusading times about the Muslims and deepened when Ottoman tolerance of foreigners brought greater numbers of Europeans to the lands of Islam. (*Islam and the West* 82)

The prevalence of this theme can be observed in the obsession of European writers with conditions of the *harem* and its inhabitants in Islamic countries, which often reflected their lack of knowledge and the propensity towards producing an exotic picture of the insatiable licentious Turk and the carefree wanton woman, an imaginative, mysterious colorful picture that addressed the imagination of the European male and appealed to his instincts.

The picture of the Ottomans was not however totally abhorrent. For instance, according to Faroqhi, “the vision of the Ottoman polity relayed by the Venetian ambassadors, whose views were to become crucial for European political thinking down to – in some cases – the twentieth century, began to change from admiration to abhorrence only around 1600” (24). Along with the negative theological image surviving from the medieval period depicting Muslims as the hideous infidels, there existed a secular image of the Turkish Empire as an admirably powerful and efficient military and political power. The extensive trade and diplomatic relations that developed between the English and the Ottoman Empire during the sixteenth century helped ameliorate the negative attitude towards the Turks. With the establishment of the Muscovy Company in 1553, largely concerned with the trade with Persia and the Levant Company in 1581 for enhancing trade with the Ottoman Levant, new channels of information about the Islamic East became available. In English literature, the representation of Islam and the Muslims was thus the product of complex factors: religious, political, and economic. Although the theological view continued to be influential, it was no longer the dominant one; the flow of information that came with the travelers, traders, and diplomats found its way into the public knowledge about the Muslim east. The new source of information drawing upon a first-hand experience of the Islamic world worked somewhat as a corrective to the erroneous information inherited from the Middle Ages. Travellers’ accounts of the Islamic east introduced new elements of thinking about Islam and the Muslims as their interest was not chiefly religious; in addition to the religious beliefs and customs, a new interest in the contemporary conditions and lives of people, their manners and customs, and their traits, became of much interest to them as well as to the reading public.

European diplomats, merchants, and travelers to the Islamic world during the seventeenth century played a great role in enhancing the Europeans’ knowledge about the Muslims. Trade with such European states as Venice, the Netherlands,

France and England developed considerably during the seventeenth century. In spite of the frequent wars with Venice, the Ottoman diplomatic and trade relations with the city were better than with any other European state (Faroqhi, 141). The Frenchmen, enemies of the Habsburgs, were, as such, considered possible allies of the Ottomans, and capitulations were issued granting trade privileges for the French; the same applied to the Dutch before them. The English commercial and diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire grew steadily during the second half of sixteenth century, partly through Queen Elizabeth's attempts to secure an anti-Spanish alliance with the Sublime Porte. By the end of the seventeenth century, trade with the Ottoman Empire accounted for one fourth of the total English overseas trade (Matar, *Islam in Britain* 11).

Dramatic Representation of the Turk

The large number of English plays by dramatists of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods attests to the anxious and deep interest in Islamic themes and characters and reflects the variety of attitudes towards the fearful Turks. As early as 1915, Louis Wan made a list of 47 plays dealing with Islamic themes published during the period from 1579 to 1642 (164-66), and Jonathan Burton also listed the names of 58 dramatic works with Islamic characters, themes, or settings between 1579 and 1624 (*Turned Turk* 311-312). “The way that English dramatists, preachers, theologians and others confronted Islam and Muslims,” Matar points out, “was by fabricating images about them by arranging protagonists and geography in a manner that was disembodied from history and cultural surroundings” (*Islam in Britain* 20). While the plays written on Islamic characters are often based on historical facts and real encounters with Turks, related by diplomats, travelers, or captives, the playwrights usually departed from actuality and allowed themselves to concur in the collective notions often bent on the demonization of Muslims and widespread in popular culture. In the dramatic representations of the Turks, an imaginative terrain totally divorced from the cultural and political world of reality, the English playwrights gave full rein to their imagination to construct an imaginary enemy of their creation on the stage. The Turk of the English stage is intended to stir the audience’ fear and indignation and to fulfill Europeans’ unrealized dream of vanquishing that formidable and victorious enemy, in a way that reminds us of the always defeated Saracens of the medieval *Chansons de Gestes*. The stereotypical qualities associated with Turks and Moors – their cruelty, lust, aggression, and despotism – figure prominently in the Renaissance dramatic works dealing with Islamic themes and characters. English playwrights such as George Peele, Christopher Marlowe, Robert Greene, Thomas Kyde, Fulke Greville, John Heywood, Robert Daborne, Philip Mssinger and Willian Shakespeare, all tried their hands at this popular type of plays, sometime referred to as “Turkish plays.”

The vogue of presenting Turkish figures on the English theatre owes much to Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine I and II* (1587-88); according to Linda McJannet, "Marlowe was apparently the first English playwright to represent a historically recognizable Turkish sultan on the public stage" (88). Marlowe's sultan, however departs from the conventional image of the Turkish sultan in English drama and from the historical portrayals of Bajazeth, as Marlowe introduces him without the conventional attributes associated with Turkish characters such as rage, lust, treachery, and cruelty. Bajazeth, however, is presented as the powerful enemy of Christianity, besieging Constantinople and "all glutted with the Christians' blood" (*Part II. I. i.* 14). Far from echoing the Saidian paradigm of the "ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority" (*Orientalism* 44), the play reflects that the actual balance of power was in favour of the formidable Turks. Nabil Matar, Mathew Dimmock, and Jonathan Burton have convincingly shown the inapplicability of Said's approach to the early modern period. Matar, in *Islam in Britain and Turks, Moors, and Englishmen*, demonstrates that sixteenth-century England was not in a superior position to the Turks and that the literary representation of the Turks cannot be explained as proof of the Saidian orientalist approach. For Burton, Marlowe's representation of Turkish strength is "representative of actual Turkish strength," and "the two *Tamurlaine* plays interrogate European responses to that power" (*Image of the Turk* 127). Thus the Sultan's boasting of his triumphs over the Christian forces resonates with the apprehensive spectators, worried over the Turkish threatening of Constantinople:

*We hear the Tartars and the eastern thieves,
Under the conduct of one Tamburlaine,
Presume a bickering with your emperor,
And think to rouse us from our dreadful siege
Of the famous Grecian Constantinople.
As many circumcised Turks we have,
And warlike bands of Christians renied,
As hath the Ocean or the Terrene sea
Small drops of water when the moon begins
To join in one her semicircle horns.
Yet would we not be braved with foreign power,
Nor raise our siege before the Grecians yield
Or breathless lie before the city walls.*
(*Part I. III.iii.2-15*)

The several references to the Turkish superior power "that lately made all Europe quake for fear" (*Part I. III.iii.135*) are indicative of the fears of the English people of the Ottoman threat.

The play also voices the European satisfaction with the continuity of the Per-

sian-Turkish conflict, which many considered as a way of easing the Turkish pressure on Europe. The “conflict between Ottoman and Persian,” Dimmock explains, “gradually began to be seen in different forms as a division that Christian powers might profitably exploit” (138). Hence the association between Tamburlaine’s distraction of the Turks and the Persian distraction is clear in the play. Tamburlaine is seen as the scourge of God against the Ottomans, and his victories over the Ottomans and his humiliation of the Ottoman Sultan are gloated over by the English spectators as a source of vicarious pleasure. In his challenge of the Turks, Tamburlaine is seen as acting on behalf of the Christians against both the Ottomans and the corsairs of Barbary:

*I that am termed the scourge and wrath of God,
The only fear and terror of the world,
Will first subdue the Turk, and then enlarge
Those Christian captives which you keep as slaves,
Burdening their bodies with your heavy chains,
And feeding them with thin and slender fare,
That naked row about the Terrene sea,
And, when they chance to breathe and rest a space,
Are punished with bastones so grievously
That they lie panting on the galley’s side,
And strive for life at every stroke they give.
These are the cruel pirates of Argier,
That damned train, the scum of Africa,
Inhabited with straggling runagates,
That make quick havoc of the Christian blood.
But, as I live, that town shall curse the time
That Tamburlaine set foot in Africa.*

(Part I. III. iii. 44-60)

Negative references to Islam abound in Marlowe’s play. In one of the play’s most notorious scenes, Tamburlaine, who becomes Christian, orders the burning of the “Turkish Alcaron / and all the heaps of superstitious books / found in the temples of that Mahomet.” In addressing the Prophet, Tamburlaine reiterates the medieval erroneous belief that Muslims worshipped him:

*Thou art not worthy to be worshipped
That suffers flames of fire to burn the writ
Wherein the sum of thy religion rests . . .*

Well, soldiers, Mahomet remains in hell;

(Part II. IV. i. 187-96)

In all of Shakespeare's works, the conflict between Europe and Islam comes to no sharper focus than in *Othello*. William Shakespeare's *Othello* is probably the most ambiguous and intricate representation of the essence of being a Turk, or "Turkishness," during the Renaissance period. Critical response to the play has varied from considering it an expression of Shakespeare's intolerant and negative portrayal of Muslims, represented by the play's eponymous character, to the view that Shakespeare is holding the mirror to his society and to humanity, showing the dangers of prejudice and intolerance. According to B. J. Sokol, *Othello* may best be described as 'anti-racist'. That is, in it, Shakespeare neither overlooks 'racism' nor endorses it, but severely warns against it (139), and that it "shows at large tendencies contrary to denigrating Turks" (140).

Othello, the black Moor, is a valiant general in the state of Venice whose aid is needed against the Ottomans' imminent invasion of the Venetian colony of Cyprus. The sense of the impending danger of the Turks looms large at the beginning of the play, providing a sense of urgency and setting the action in motion. Shakespeare's information on the Venetian-Turkish conflict probably derives from *The History of the Turks* by Richard Knolles (Neill, 18) while the ethnographic observations in *Geographical Historie of Africa* by Leo Africanus (ca. 1492-ca.1550) could be considered the source of Shakespeare's understanding of the Moors (Burton, *Traffic* 233). *Othello* was published in 1603, responding to the growing popular interest in and anxiety about the Turks and Moors, an interest that was occasioned by a visit to London by a Moorish embassy of sixteen Moorish personages (Vitkus 150). While the play highlights the European racial bias - expressed in the inventory of racial comments vilifying and defaming the Moor - it is evident that this treatment is most probably not endorsed by Shakespeare himself. It is mostly the exasperated general Iago who voices an explicitly racial stereotypical view of Othello, depicting him as a black Moor, lascivious (I.1.135), erratic and changeable outsider (I.3.352–353), and a different Other.

Emphasizing his blackness, the colour of Satan, as a racial marker of the Moors, along with other character flaws, Shakespeare makes Iago voice the traditional Elizabethan ethnographic conception of the Moor, invoking the diabolical association of black, the colour of their skin. Thus, Iago calls him "an old black ram" (1.1.88) and "black Othello" (2.3.32); Brabantio refers to his "sooty bosom" (1.2.70); the Duke, praising Othello, tells Brabantio that "your son-in-law is far more fair than black" (1.3.290). Emilia signals the correlation with the damned black devil: "O, the more angel she, / And you the blacker devil!" (5.2.131-32). The diabolical association of blackness, Vitkus points out, has been an essential part of stereotyping the Muslim Other and demonizing Islam:

Whether imagined as a dark-skinned African Moor, or a robed and turbaned Turk, the external appearance of the Islamic Other was often read as a sign of spiritual darkness or barbaric ignorance. This point may be

linked to one more aspect of Western stereotyping – the representation of Saracens, Moors, and Turks as embodiments of evil. The stereotype of the devilish Moor or cruel Turk was sometimes employed to demonstrate the supposed iniquity of Islam, and to portray Muslims as agents of Satan. (*Three Turk Plays*, 5)

However, while Othello's blackness reveals certain prejudices shared by the other characters with the English audience, it seems to make little contribution to the development of action or to constitute an essential element in Othello's character. Shakespeare, while engaging the public views of race and colour, shows their irrelevance to the making of a person's character. In other words, the play is an implied rejection of racial prejudice; Shakespeare's position seems to have been above his society's mainstream ways of thinking about race. Othello's colour and his other racial markers are meant to resonate with the English spectators, who would associate him with a composite construct, signifying ominous otherness and evoking fear and anxiety. Othello can thus be seen as

a hybrid who might be associated, in the minds of Shakespeare's audience, with a whole set of related terms-Moor, Turk, Ottomite, Saracen, Mahometan, Egyptian, Judean, Indian-all constructed and positioned in opposition to Christian faith and virtue. More than being identified with any specific ethnic label, Othello is a theatrical embodiment of the dark, threatening powers at the edge of Christendom. Othello's identity is derived from a complex and multilayered tradition of representation which includes the classical barbarian, the Saracen or "paynim knight" of medieval romance, the blackamoor, and (an early modern version of the medieval types of lust, cruelty, and aggression) the Turk. (Vitkus, *Turning Turk*, 159-60)

Othello is seen to embody qualities that are associated in the European mind with the Turks, namely despotism, lust, and cruelty. Thus, he is the "cruel Moor" (1.247), venting murderous "tyrannous hate" (3.3.450) against Desdemona in the name of honour. Othello's ruthless murder of Desdemona and the Turkish invasion of Cyprus reinforce each other, accentuating the dread of Islamic cruelty and violence: "The frustrated male violence that was initially directed at the Islamic Other is turned on the feminine Other, forming a link between military aggression and sexual transgression, between the Turkish threat to Christian power and the contamination of female sexual purity." As Othello stands for the Turks, Desdemona becomes identified with Cyprus. In assuming the role of divine agency and retribution, Othello sees his act of murder as the lawful execution of a righteous punishment upon a sinful adulteress (Vitkus, *Turning Turk*, 169).

Othello's gradual regression from a valiant opponent of the Turkish aggression against Christendom into a merciless and vengeful murderer is interpreted as a

conversion, a turning Turk:

A baptized Moor turned Turk, Othello is “doubly damned” for backsliding. Sent out to lead a crusade against Islamic imperialism, he ‘turns Turk’ and becomes the enemy within. He has “traduced” the state of Venice and converted to the black Muslim Other, the Europeans’ phobic fantasy: Othello has become the ugly stereotype. His identity as “the noble Moor of Venice” dissolves as he reverts to the identity of the black devil and exhibits the worst features of the stereotypical “cruel Moor” or Turk – jealousy, violence, mercilessness, faithlessness, lawlessness, despair. Faced with this terrible identity, one that ‘shows horrible and grim’ (1. 202), Othello enacts his own punishment and damns himself by killing the Turk he has become. (Vitkus, *Turning Turk*, 176)

The double Turkish threat is thus perceived both in the Turkish invasion, which disappears with a sudden twist of providential fate as the Turkish fleet is drowned by a tempest, and in the internal danger of turning Turk, which proves more imperceptible and more enduring and hence more dangerous. The essential defining quality of “Turkishness,” the play indicates, is not the outward appearance or blackness, but the inward temperamental qualities. As such, “Turkishness” turns out to be a potential danger within Christianity itself; the degeneration of a Christian into acquiring Turkish, that is Islamic, traits is conceived as an internal threat lurking inside the very heart of Christendom.

Several English playwrights also wrote about the danger of turning Turk that *Othello* warns against. In plays like *A Christian Turn'd Turke* (1612), by Robert Daborne (ca. 1580 - 1628) and Philip Massinger’s *The Renegado* (1624), the danger of conversion and the fate of renegades seem to be, as the titles indicate, at the centre of the authors’ concern. The renegade as a literary type differed from the Moor or Turk in that while the latter two represented the external threat, the former represented the internal threat:

As the Moors represented all that was ‘oriental’ and alien to England, so did the renegade represent the internal evil that threatened Christendom. Indeed, what was speciously dangerous about the renegade was that he was no swarthy Moor or contorted Papist or necromancer but a common English or Irish or Welsh man who willfully renounced God and monarch and “turned Turke.” No wonder that dramatists were at pains to punish him, even if by so doing they sacrificed the truth. (Matar, *Islam in Britain* 52)

Ominous to the future of Christianity, the renegade had to be vanquished on the stage:

As a dramatic type, the renegade did not serve to vilify Muslims, as the “Moor” had done, but to embarrass, reprimand, and warn Christians. Unlike other villainies in the popular imagination, however, apostasy pointed towards a fearsome historical inevitability: as Christianity had replaced Judaism, so would Islam replace Christianity. Because the renegade was proof of that ominous possibility, English writers either defeated or reconverted him. In the imagination of seventeenth-century England, Christianity could not but be victorious (Matter, “Renegade” 502)

Thus, while in Daborne’s renegade in *A Christian Turn’d Turk* dies a horrid death, Massinger’s renegade in *The Renegado* returns to Christianity.

However, in addition to its indication of betrayal of the Christian faith and treason against Christendom, “turning Turk” suggested “the incorporation of the Turks’ stereotypical features, which include aggression, lust, suspicion, murderous conspiracy” (Vitkus, *Three Turk Plays* 2). Not only does the term reveal the sense of abhorrence towards the act of betrayal, but also echoes all the negative associations of the word “Turk.” As such, the renegade was a form of indirect condemnation of Islam, not less effective than the direct representation of Muslim characters.

Renaissance Travellers

Until the end of the sixteenth century, England lagged behind other continental powers in the field of exploration and overseas expansion. It was the Portuguese, Spaniards, and Italians who took the lead in exploring the new territories and voyaging eastwards. Thus, for example, the Italian Lodovico Varthema, who started his journey to Egypt, Arabia, India, and Persia in 1503, was the first Westerner to enter the holy city of Makkah and to set down a description of the holy mosque and the *hajj* rituals. The accounts of the Austrian humanist and naturalist, who served from 1554 until 1562 as an ambassador at Constantinople, Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq (1522 - 82), are particularly important. In his *Turkish Letters*, in addition to his description of the plants and animals of Turkey, Busbecq spoke admirably of the Ottoman Empire’s superior military power, and the absolute rule of the Ottoman sultans. One reason he considered contributed to the rise and of the Ottomans and the efficiency and greatness of their empire was that people were judged mainly by their merit, not by their birth:

there was not in all that great assembly a single man who owed his position to aught save his valour and his merit. No distinction is attached to birth among the Turks; the deference to be paid to a man is measured by the position he holds in the public service. There is no fighting for prece-

dence; a man's place is marked out by the duties he discharges. In making his appointments the Sultan pays no regard to any pretensions on the score of wealth or rank, nor does he take into consideration recommendations or popularity; he considers each case on its own merits, and examines carefully into the character, ability, and disposition of the man whose promotion is in question. It is by merit that men rise in the service, a system which ensures competent. (2: 154)

Busbecq's book remained a reliable source of information about the Ottomans throughout the sixteenth century.

The beginning of the seventeenth century witnessed the English vigorous participation in the age of geographical discoveries and the laying down of the English Empire. Gerald MacLean points out at that the first two decades of the seventeenth century "witnessed a new development among English book production: the professionalization of Orient travel writing by English writers who went East precisely in order to write about it" (5). Seventeenth century English travellers to Egypt, the Levant and the Ottoman Empire included Thomas Dallam (c.1575-c.1630), George Sandys (1578 - 1644), William Lithgow (1582 - 1645), and Henry Blount (1602 - 1682). The accounts of those travelers attest to the diversity of views and attitudes towards the Ottoman Empire during that period, ranging from wonder and admiration to fear and condemnation. While admitting the persistence of the hostile attitudes towards Islam, having roots in the rivalries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, MacLean disputes the common tendency to view the European attitudes towards the Ottomans as being uniformly hostile:

English attitudes towards the Ottoman Empire in the early modern period were not as uniformly hostile or as fearful as we have often been led to believe by followers of the school of Richard Knolles who, in 1603, declared the Ottomans to be 'the present terror of the world.' In various forms this is a war cry that continues to haunt us today. By linking crusading rhetoric with millennial literalism, a powerful tradition of Protestant thought has perpetuated the belief that there can be, and indeed must be, only conflict with Islam. (xiii)

The travel account written by George Sandys (1578 - 1644) is a good example of the novel humanist attitude to the Muslim world in travel writing. Sandys was a poet, traveler, and translator whose book *In Relation of a Journey Begun An. Dom. 1610*, published in 1615, describes the two-year journey he began in 1610 to Constantinople, Egypt and Palestine. Sandys' book is a compendium of Renaissance learning that reflects the author's talent and erudition. It had a resonance among his contemporaries and later generations for its literary and cultural value. According to Jonathan Haynes, the *Relation* set a new standard for English travel lit-

erature, in its depth and accuracy, and in its formality. This formality is not simply a matter of literary finish, though it is that too: more importantly it demonstrates an ability to give form to the foreign and the past, in a deliberate and comprehensive way, to appropriate great tracts of cultural history and deliver them to the English reader. (15).

Sandys's representation of the Orient helped construct a frame of mind to understand and respond to that part of the world, its culture and its peoples. In other words, Sandys helped create the Orient for the West, in a way that fits with Said's description of Orientalism as a discipline "by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively" (3). In addition to its literary merit and its impressing display of the author's massive erudition, as manifested in his manipulation of a huge number of quotations from Classical and Renaissance writings, the book, as James Ellison points out, has also "the positive values of moderation, religious tolerance, and opposition to despotism" (49).

During his sea voyage, Sandys reflects with regret on the Ottomans' destruction and enslavement of Mediterranean Greek centers of liberty and democracy (9). The Turkish Empire is portrayed as being hostile to learning and culture (72). The Turks' are also portrayed as the religious foe of Christendom, the usurpers of the holy land and other Christian provinces in the East. In Jerusalem, Sandys is abhorred to see "the enemies of Christ to be the Lords of his Sepulchre!" (161). The chapter about Turkey, which covers issues related to Islam and the Prophet, is shaped by the Christian polemic against Islam. According to Sandys, Muhammad was a leader of a band of revolting mercenaries in the Roman army in their rebellion against their Roman leaders because of the unequal treatment they received. The leader of the discontented Arab soldiers then, compensating for his feeling of unworthiness due to his low birth, proclaimed himself the prophet of a new religion. With the help of the Nestorian monk Sergius and a Jew called Abdella he "compiled his damnable doctrine ... containing a hodgepodge of sundry religions" (52-53). In his treatment of Muhammad and Islam, Sandys remains indebted to medieval literature, drawing upon such common legends of the Middle Ages, as those of the dove and the Prophet's "falling sickness."

Sandys' concern with the internal politics in England and with king James I's increasing tyrannical tendencies is reflected in his treatment of the nature of tyranny and the absolute rule in the Ottoman Empire. Sandys's lengthy discussion of the dangers of tyranny are thus of unmistakably domestic relevance. In Egypt, he depicts the atrocities of the Egyptian *Bassa*, who rules without any checks or constraints (108), and in Sidon he takes its Emir Faccardine as another example of tyranny.

Relations with the Ottoman Empire were of great interest for the Renaissance traveler, as James Ellison notes, and Sandys' tackling of issues related to political and military concerns seems to address this interest. His description of the castle

in Zacynthus and the fortifications in Alexandria fits well with the role of military intelligence, for instance. Sandys is very conscious of the military threat posed by the Turks and he describes the Ottoman Empire as ‘the greatest that is, or perhaps that ever was from the beginning’ (46). Notwithstanding Sandys’ admiration of the efficiency and military prowess, he was among the first to record what he considered as signs of deterioration and decline:

And surely it is to be hoped that their greatnesse is not onely at the height, but, neare an extreme precipitation: the body being growne too monstrous for the head; the Sultans vnwarlicke, and neuer accompanying their armies in person; the Souldier corrupted with ease and liberty, drowned in prohibited wine, enfeebled with the continuall conuerse of women, and generally lapsed from their former austerity of life, and simplicity of manners. Their valours now meeting on all sides with opposition; hauing of late giuen no increase to their dominions: & Empire so got, when it ceasseth to increase, doth begin to diminish. Lastly, in that it hath exceeded the obserued period of a Tyrannie, for such is their Empire. (50)

The travels of the French travelers Jean de Thévenot and John Chardin to Turkey and Persia were translated into English and soon became popular sources of interesting information about the Muslim people and their customs and religion. The French traveler Jean de Thevenot started his journey to the Ottoman Empire in

1655. Thévenot’s account contains a description of the city of Constantinople and the architectural splendor of its imperial mosques, like Hagia Sophia and Sulaimania, and other buildings and monuments. He observes that all those imperial mosques “have hospitals and schools where many poor scholars are maintained and educated” (Mayo 72). In his detailed report of the Sultan’s court, Thevenot devotes a considerable section to the Sultan’s *harem*. The daily lives and activities of the Sultan’s concubines are fully described, along with the punishment of erring ones, sometimes very cruel as in the case of those guilty of infidelity, who are bound hand and foot, put in a sack and thrown into the sea at night (81). He commends the Turks’ cleanliness and their frequent visits to public baths, which he remarks are abundant in all towns and villages.

As for the religion of the Turks, Thévenot’s account of Islam’s five pillars is relatively accurate:

I. to pray five times a day. II. To fast in Lent, or the Ramadan, as they distinguish it. III. To give alms and perform works of charity. IV. To go on a pilgrimage to Mecca. V. To keep the body clean. Four other points are reckoned of importance, though not of absolute necessity to salvation. To keep Friday as Sabbath; to be circumcised; to drink no wine; and to abstain from swine’s flesh, or things strangled. (Mayo 90)

Thevenot commends the congenial and peaceful character of the Turks, who consider their prayer ineffectual unless they forgive their enemies. The simplicity of Islam and the importance laid on good works in it make Thevenot go to the extent of saying that although “the difference in religious sentiments will not permit us to regard them as brethren in the same faith, we shall be obliged to allow them at least the character of being good Samaritans.” He considers the Turks to be “the most charitable people on earth,” whose charity and “humane attention” extend even to animals and plants (91). He also praises their tolerance and good treatment of Christians, “who enjoy full liberty of conscience, and much greater tranquility than among some who style themselves Christians” (94).

John Chardin (1643 - 1712), who traveled in Persia as a jeweler, wrote favorably about the Persians as Thevenot praised the Turks. His shrewd observations and vivid descriptions of Persia’s cities, its splendid mosques, and its ancient monuments, in addition to the particulars of his adventures, make his Travels an interesting read. As Thevenot has noted about the absolute rule in the Ottoman Empire, Chardin comments on Oriental despotism as the mark of the Persian monarchy, as well as of other Eastern governments:

The Republican Government is unknown in Persia, and further on, to the Extremity of the World. None but the Despotic Government is known here, and they cannot conceive the Administration of the Sovereign Power, by a Plurality of Persons of equal Authority, nor even that holy and happy Power of the Laws, which serves as a Barrier against Tyranny. They are accustomed throughout the East to the Yoke of one Man, whose Caprice is Sovereign Law, and who does and undoes as he himself pleases, without either Reason or Sense. (166)

Sir Paul Rycaut’s *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1668) was a standard source of information about Islam during the second half of the seventeenth century. Intended as a continuation of Knolles’ *General History*, it was added in later editions as an appendix to it. The result of five years of service in Constantinople as secretary to the British Ambassador, Rycaut’s book covers such areas as the political structure of the Turkish Empire, the tenets of the Islamic faith, Islamic religious practices, and the main sects in Islam.

Commenting on the despotism of the Turkish government and the severity and quickness of the administration of justice, “which punishes the least crime committed against the State with Death, the Dread of which curbs the Ambition of the Governours of the most remote Provinces of the Empire,” Rycaut tells his readers that tyranny has become “as wholesome and natural to them as the mothers milk to a child.” Considering the “absoluteness of the prince, who acts as much without controul, as he does without reason,” he concludes that “the vast Encrease of this Empire were rather to be attributed to some supernatural Cause, than its Founda-

tion or Management of its Governours” (4). Such titles of the Grand Signior as “God upon earth” and “the shadow of God” are quite indicative of the Emperor’s absolute power, he notes (5).

As Linda Darling shows, Rycaut’s discussion of the sultan’s absolute power is contrary to the historical facts of the period he wrote about:

In reality, however, Ottoman political thought acknowledged checks on the sultan’s behavior. The Ottoman ruler was bound by Islamic law – covering social, political, and religious questions, originating in God and unalterable by human rulers – as well as by past customs and prior decrees. In addition, in the Near East the ruler’s legitimacy rested on the provision of justice and order, and any subject, even the poorest, could challenge this legitimacy through the right of direct petition to the sultan himself. Further, by the seventeenth century the sultan was removed from the business of government, which was in the hands of officials and the great men of state. The sultan was not free to act on his every whim, and an Ottoman scholar would dismiss Rycaut’s rhetoric as the product of ignorance and prejudice. (82-83)

But Rycaut was not ignorant of the political affairs of the Empire. Dismissing the likelihood of ignorance on the grounds of his long residence in the Ottoman Empire, Darling suggests that his attack on Ottoman tyranny actually served as an indirect comment on the Restoration politics in England (84). As such, Rycaut’s book lies within a tradition in which criticism of Islam was a means of reflecting on the political conditions in Europe. Rycaut was thus a precursor of such Enlightenment writers as Voltaire and Montesquieu, whose satirical writings about Islam were actually directed at the vices of the *Ancien Régime* in France.

Rycaut’s treatment of the themes of marriage and family life of the Muslims combines the Western fascination with the sexuality of the Muslim peoples with the notion of Oriental despotism. For Rycaut, the Muslims’ social life and their marriage system are closely related to their political system. The main objective in permitting polygamy in Islam, Rycaut claims, is to increase the number of Muslims. Although the Qur’an does restrict the number of women a Muslim can marry, a Turk marries only four wives because of the dowry he is obliged to give to every one of his wives (2: 58). Rycaut explains three types of divorce in Islam; in the third type, if the husband alters his mind and desires to remarry his wife, “he cannot by law receive her again till he consents to see another person enjoy her before his face” (2: 59). In addition to having four wives, men have the liberty to enjoy as many women slaves as they like. Rycaut dwells on the sultan’s *seraglio* and its *harem*, cataloging the different categories of eunuchs, mutes and dwarfs who attended upon its lady denizens, as well as the arts the females of the *harem* are skilled at to divert the sultan and to satisfy his indulgences. Rycaut relates the repression of women in the seraglio to the political repression of the Ottoman

Sultan that he describes. The seraglio, Joanna de Groot notes, was “established by early modern European texts as symbol and evidence of associations between the despotic power, religious depravity and luxurious decadence of inhumane, immoral ‘oriental’ infidels” (69).

As part of the interest in the sexuality of the Muslims and as evidence of their moral depravity, the subject of homosexuality appears frequently in most Western accounts of the Muslim world. According to Rycaut, homosexuality is a widespread illicit passion among the Turks that is especially spread among the janissary youths. Sultan Murad is said to have been enamored with an Armenian boy and then another of Galata, whom he advanced to the rank of sword-bearer. Women, Rycaut adds, are not less disposed to this unlawful pleasure.

Rycaut repeats the common view that Muhammad composed the Qur'an with the assistance of Sergius. The Qur'an is one of the three books of Islam; the other two are authored by his disciples. Rycaut expounds the principles of Islam at length, though superficially and inaccurately. For example, in the naming of the five pillars of Islam, he substitutes for the first, the recital of the creed, a commandment of “the cleanliness of the body and garments.” Explaining the difference between the two main sects of Islam, Rycaut claims that the Sunni Muslims are the followers of Muhammad while the Shi'a prefer Ali to Muhammad.

Rycaut links the Muslims' firm belief in fate to the spread of the plague. He argues that the Muslim doctrine of predestination, that man's destiny is determined by God in advance and that no one can avoid what is written in heaven, leads them to consider it wrong to try to avoid the plague. According to Rycaut, Muhammad told Muslims not to abandon a place where the plague rages because their days are numbered by God. Rycaut notes that in Constantinople, the healthy visit and mingle freely with the sick without fear of contracting the plague; consequently, it is common to see whole families perish.

Charity, Rycaut declares, is the paramount moral virtue among the Turks. Charitable acts include the building of public inns prepared for the benefit of travelers and extend even to feeding dogs in the streets and being careful not to overburden camels. Honesty and justice, however, are not among the qualities of the Turks, whose religion enjoins them to disregard their covenants and treaties if this would enhance their political interests. Treachery of the Turks then has its origin in their religion and the teachings of their prophet.

The tone of the works of such travelers as Thevenot, Chardin and Rycaut was generally less antagonistic than that of the theological polemics of the Middle Ages. Muslims are presented as actual humans – though still different and baser in every way – rather than monsters. The image of Islam and the Muslims in the travelers' accounts, although far short of being accurate or totally unbiased, is free of the medieval absurdities and its legendary material. In the words of Anthony Pagden, these works “were a huge improvement on the scattered fantasies and lurid tales that had hitherto fed the European idea of the ‘Orient,’ and if their

often disingenuous accounts failed to make Asia any less exotic and menacing than it had been for previous generations, they made it a great deal more familiar” (*Worlds* 326). The impact of travel literature, however, was of little consequence upon other types of writing; the dramatists and poets of the period seem to have made almost no use of it.

Theological Views

It is in the writings of the theologians of the period that the polemical discourse survives, articulated in the harshest tone. The writings of theologians of the seventeenth century overflow with acrimony and antagonism towards Islam and the Prophet. The strong feelings of intolerance and hatred with which the numerous histories and biographies of the Prophet and the accounts of the Islamic religion published during that period are infused can partly be attributed to the spirit of the religious conflict between the Catholics and Protestants during that period in Europe and the civil war in England.

The inadequate translation of the Qur'an into French, and from it into English, Dutch, German, and Russian did not help decrease ignorance of Islam or diffuse prejudice against it. The French translation was the work of André du Ryer (ca. 1580 - ca. 1672), who lived in Egypt as a vice consul of France and in Constantinople as secretary to the French ambassador. Du Ryer, who knew Arabic, Turkish, and Farsi, completed his translation from Arabic in 1647. Alexander Ross was probably the first translator of the Qur'an into the English language in 1649. The purpose of his translation according to the title page is “the satisfaction of all that desire to look into the Turkish vanities.” Moreover, speaking to the reader, Ross contends in his introduction to the translation that in “viewing thine enemies in their full body, thou maist the better prepare to encounter, and I hope overcome them,” assuring him that, “thou shalt find [the Qur'an] of so rude, and incongruous a composure, so farced with contradictions, blasphemies, obscene speeches, and ridiculous fables” (*Alcoran* 2). “*A Needful Caveat or Admonition for them who desire to know what use may be made of, or if there be danger in reading the Alcoran,*” accompanied the anonymous English translation attributed to Ross. In the “Caveat,” Ross assures his readers that there would be no harm to good believers in reading the Qur'an since it is no more dangerous than those errors attributed to ancient peoples whose stories are described in the Bible or even those follies in contemporary Christian heresies.

For Ross, the Muslims’ conversion to Islam was not out of conviction or the result of their devotion to the Qur'an; nor was it because of any inherent “loveliness” in it, but rather partly the outcome “of fear, being forced by the Sword,” partly because of the Muslims’ ignorance of the Bible and their uncritical mind, and also because of the Qur'an’s promise to them of “permitting multiplicity of

Wives and Concubines, and a reward for those that shall murder and rob.” Reading such “a misshapen and deformed piece,” Ross contends, will actually “confirm us in the truth, and cause us love the Scripture so much the more.” Moreover, knowing “evil as well as good, falsehood as well as Truth,” is necessary that “we may avoid the one, and so much more love the other.” Besides, as the Qur'an is “immethodical and confused, contradictory in many things, written in a rude Language,” being the invention of an ignorant man, in reading it, “we shall be forced to admire and praise the goodness of God towards us Christians.”

In addition to the “Caveat,” Ross is also the author of a short biography of the Prophet, “*The Life of Mahomet, the Prophet of the Turks, and Author of the Alcoran*” (1649), in which he repeats some medieval legends like that of Muhammad's authorship of the Qur'an with the assistance a Jew and a Christian monk, those of the pigeon and the ox, and of the Prophet's epilepsy. Bereft of his Jewish mother, Muhammad is sold by his uncle as a slave, to be purchased by a wealthy merchant, who employs him in his commerce. He then meets Sergius, the Nestorian monk who had fled to Arabia and found protection with Muhammad's master. When Sergius finds in Muhammad a possible disciple, he teaches him his heresies. Through sorcery and by means of gifts that Muhammad had obtained from his travels, he was then able to win the favor of *Ajissa* and to marry her. But being afflicted in his body with the “falling sickness,” in the way of punishment for proclaiming himself a prophet of God, he manages to convince his distressed wife that his infirmity was the effect of Gabriel's visitations on his frail body (v). The promise of a Paradise full of sensual pleasures, Ross adds, acquired Muhammad a large following, mostly of “the ignorant and meaner sort,” and by the use of force, he made himself king over the Arabs. Before his death, Muhammad told his people that he will rise on the third day and ascend to Heaven. On the fourth day, the impatient followers took his putrefied body to bury it at Medina.

In *The Life and Death of Mahumed* (1678), Lancelot Addison, the father of the essayist Joseph Addison, declares his purpose in his address to the reader as “to report the things relating to *Mahumed* and his Doctrine, and to free both from many fabulous *passages* have been long *currant* in their *Story*.” According to his stated purpose to present the life of Muhammad free from the old fables, he rejects the notions of Muhammad's mother as being a Jewess and of the Prophet's low birth and slavery as false and unwarranted. The prevalent tone of the book remains, however, extremely intolerant and prejudiced in its attack upon the character of the Prophet and the Qur'an.

According to his version of the story of the Christian monk, Muhammad met a hermit called Bohira in Jerusalem, who acquainted him of the pernicious falseness of idolatry and instructed him in the knowledge of the true God. Upon his return to Mecca, Muhammad began to show his revulsion to the idolatrous rites of his people and finally withdrew into a cave to reflect upon the thoughts he heard from Bohira. Muhammad's life of abstinence and austerity during that time eventually

ended up in “perfect Lunacy;” he became “so hypocondriack, that he began to talk idly … going up and down after an odd distracted manner” (33).

Addison presents Muhammad as an imposter who pretended that Gabriel spoke to him, revealing to him the word of God. Being illiterate, Muhammad depended on a converted Jewish scribe to write down the verses of the Qur'an. The scribe noticed that the Qur'an consisted of mere forgeries, and to test its divine origin, he used to alter the endings of many verses, which was never detected. Byron Smith remarks that “Addison does not inform us how it became known that the scribe falsified the text of the Koran” (31). The Prophet himself used to change verses as he liked, revoking some to substitute others in their place. He did not order collecting the Qur'an in a book so that he would make whatever alterations that suited his changing purposes. Moreover, when Othman came to compile the Qur'an, large portions were already forgotten or lost. The “sum and substance of all [Muhammad's] Impostures,” the Qur'an contains “many excellent Truths” (39-40), mixed with “many contrarieties and repugnancies” (42). Addison concludes that “the Alcoran is a very *rude Poem*; and the things therein contained, are so loose and incoherent” (53).

The most influential biography of the Prophet of Islam for a long time was Humphrey Prideaux's *The Nature of Imposture Fully Displayed in the Life of Mahomet*, published in 1697. Prideaux's notorious book remained an authoritative work of reference about Muhammad and Islam for almost a century. The same spirit of animosity and intolerance that characterized the works of Ross and Addison inform this work. A blend of the historical and the polemical, it repeats the old legends about Muhammad and introduces others to prove him as an imposter. The list of sources that Prideaux relied on is rather impressive, including translations of a large number of Arabic manuscripts collected by Edward Pocock, the professor of Arabic at Oxford, in addition to other sources in Hebrew, Chaldean, Greek, Latin, French, and English.

Intended to be part of a longer work on the decline of the Eastern Church, Prideaux's book was also aimed as a response to the deists, who, in favor of Deism or natural religion, repudiated traditional Christianity as superstitious. The scientific discoveries of the seventeenth century assured people that the universe was governed by constant laws and that both reason and nature attested to the existence of God, the creator of our orderly world. However, the predictability in the working of the universe contrasted with the accounts of miracles in the Bible. Moreover, textual criticism, a new field of study that developed at the hands of such scholars as Thomas Hobbes and Baruch Spinoza proved the historical accounts in the Bible to be irreconcilable with historical facts and that the biblical text has undergone numerous alterations and contained many contradictions. Prideaux intended to defend the truth of Christianity against the charge of imposture and to show Islam as its perfect model.

In the preface, Prideaux considers the Saracens to be “the instruments of

[God's] wrath" that he sent to punish Christians for the contentions and heresies that they allowed to thrive among them (viii). The fate of the Eastern Church is a reminder for contemporary Christians of the outcome of letting divisions and disputations to weaken them; for God would send another plague like that of Muhammad to destroy what is left of their religion.

The two qualities which are the keys to understanding the character of Muhammad, according to Prideaux, are ambition and lust:

His two predominant passions were Ambition and Lust. The course which he took to gain Empire, abundantly shows the former; and the multitude of Women which he had to do with, proves the later. And indeed these two run through the whole Frame of his Religion; there being scarce a Chapter in his Alcoran, which doth not lay down some Law of War and Bloodshed for the promoting of the one, or else give some liberty for the use of Women here, or some promise for the enjoyment of them hereafter, to the gratifying of the other. (142)

Ambition, one of Muhammad's greatest motivations, was stirred by his marriage to the wealthy Khadija. From his travels to Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, he got acquainted with Jews and Christians and decided that starting a sect of his own would be the best thing to do to attain power and sovereignty over his nation. In preparation of that venture and being a cunning man, he saw it fit to retreat into a cave and assume the solitary life of a hermit so that people would forget his licentious and wicked life. Muhammad suffered from epilepsy, and another example of his cunning is his feigning a trance, which he pretended to be the result of conversing with Gabriel, whenever he fell into a fit. "The whole of [Muhammad's] imposture," Prideaux contends, "was a thing of extraordinary craft, carried on with all the cunning and caution imaginable." Therefore, the stories of the bull and the pigeon are to be rejected as being as "idle fables," "without any foundation or likelihood of truth" (50).

Muhammad, being illiterate, was assisted in writing the Qur'an by a Jewish scribe and a Nestorian monk. From the Jewish scribe, named Abdollah Ebn Sallem or Salman the Persian, Muhammad "seems to have received whatsoever of the Rites and Customs of the Jews he hath ingrained into his Religion" (44). For Prideaux, the Nestorian monk, whose name is Bahira in some writings he consulted and Segius in others, are actually the same person. Muhammad met him in Syria or Palestine and befriended him. When this monk, for some crime that he committed was excommunicated and expelled from the monastery, he fled to Arabia and stayed with Muhammad, who benefited from him in composing the Qur'an, and after he was in no further need of him and "to secure the secret, he put him to death" (48). The three components of Muhammad's religion are thus derived from the Jewish scribe, the Christian monk, and the heathen Arabs (49).

Byron Smith rightly observes that “we are not told whether the Jew or the Christian was responsible for the perfection of language and style” (34).

Having satisfied his first passion, ambition, Muhammad, by the power he attained, turned to his lust to gratify. Prideaux refers to the number of the Prophet’s wives, some say twenty-one and others fifteen, besides several concubines. Although the law stipulates a limit of four wives for every man, “whatever laws he gave to restrain the lust of other Men, he took care always to except himself, resolving it seems to take his full swing herein without Let or Control” (153). Prideaux refers to the Qur’anic sensual description of the promised Paradise, as a testimony to the carnality of the Prophet and the corruption and the carnal nature of his people “who are exceedingly given to the love of women” (27).

Another point that Prideaux emphasizes in many parts of his book is that of the inherent violence of Islam, which dictates “War, Bloodshed and Violence in matters of Religion as one of its chiefest Virtues” (ix). As a prophet who was “sent principally to show the fortitude of God by the power of the sword,” Muhammad did not need miracles. God sent him with the power of the sword to compel people to enter into the faith. From the conquest of Mecca to the end of his life, Muhammad is engaged in fighting to establish his faith. He enjoins his followers that “this religion was to be propagated … not by disputing but by fighting,” commanding them to “arm themselves and slay all those who would not embrace it, unless they submitted to pay an Annual Tribute for the redemption of their Lives.” The “power of the Sword” is a “universal doctrine” of Muslims, according to which “all of them are bound to fight for it.” (35).

Prideaux’s approach to Muhammad proved of a remarkable effect in promoting an exceedingly negative view of the Prophet and Islam, encompassing all those classical accusations that continued to be directed against the Prophet of Islam for a long time: imposture as the characterizing mark, ambition and lust as the main keys to understanding his character, and the use of force in propagating Islam. Prideaux’s book represents the apex of the theological approach towards Islam and Muhammad. Although, it “marks a real if limited advance,” compared with such a legendary work as that of Alexander Ross, P. M. Holt remarks that “the resultant biography is an unskilful combination of Muslim tradition and Christian legend, inspired by a sour animosity towards its subject.” In Prideaux’s work, Holt adds, “there is at least a historical framework although much overlaid by legendary material … and distorted by polemical bias” (294). Despite its popularity, it was out of harmony with the growing spirit of tolerance and objectivity that characterized the treatment of its subject during the eighteenth century.

Islam in The Age of Reason

The Eighteenth Century

The eighteenth century signals a considerable change in the Western attitude towards Islam and its founder. The development of a secular view of history during the age of Enlightenment, resulting in a new approach to the Prophet as a historical figure, informs the period's treatment of Islam and its history. Islam came to be seen as a form of natural religion, free of the superstitions of Christianity. A new recognition of the positive role of Islam in world history also appears in the new histories.

The eighteenth century witnessed a shift of power balance in favour of the Christian West. A steady decline in the Turkish military power is signalled by the defeat of the Turks in the battle of Lepanto in 1571. In 1683, the failed siege of Vienna was another major turning point. The Turks were then obliged in 1699 to sign the humiliating Treaty of Karlowitz, in which they conceded to surrender parts of their territories to European powers. Whereas, as Edward Said notes, "from the end of the seventh century to the battle of Lepanto in 1571, Islam in either its Arab, Ottoman, or North African and Spanish form dominated or effectively threatened European Christianity" (Orientalism 74), now the threat of Islam ceased to trouble Europe.

The Enlightenment's Reassessment of Islam

Two factors affected the treatment of Islam during the age of Enlightenment. First, there was the increasing aversion towards all religions, which represented to the men of the Enlightenment a major challenge to the spirit of rationality they cherished. Second, there was the new relativistic outlook on all world cultures and religions, according to which Christianity's claim to superiority came under scrutiny.

Although the interest in studying Arabic had declined after the Middle Ages, when it ceased to be a source of learning, the need for Arabic for missionary purposes was behind the repeated call for establishing the organised study of it. As mentioned before, the decision of the Council of Vienna as early as 1312 to teach Arabic, Hebrew, Syriac, and Greek in Paris, Oxford, Bologna, Avignon, and Salamanca was not put into action. Now, a new need for the study of Arabic arose from its relevance to Bible studies. Because of its closeness to the languages of the Bible, Aramaic and Hebrew, it was believed that the study of Arabic could be useful in biblical studies. Thus, in 1539, teaching Arabic began at the College de France in Paris; Guillaume Postel (1510 - 1581) was the first to hold that chair. In

1613, teaching Arabic began at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands, and the first holder of the chair of Arabic there was Thomas Erpenius (1584 - 1624), the author of the first grammar of Arabic. In England, a chair of Arabic was created at Cambridge in 1632 and another one at Oxford in 1636. The first holder of the chair at Oxford was Edward Pocock (1604 - 91). In 1586, the first Arabic printing press had been established by Ferdinand de Medici, the duke of Tuscany.

The first encyclopaedic work on Islam was Barthélemy d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque Orientale*, published posthumously in 1697. It remained a standard reference work until the early nineteenth century. It was the most ambitious attempt to present to the West the essence of the East, encompassing all the acquired knowledge about the history, geography, culture, religious beliefs, theology, science, and art of the Muslim world.

In the entry on Muhammad in Pier Bayle's *Dictionare Historique et Critique* (1697), published in English in 1709, we find an example of how the eighteenth-century secularism did not always result in a sympathetic view of the Prophet. Though a typical example of "the shift from theological to naturalistic accounts that gathered pace in the following two centuries" (Almond, 413), it does not represent an improvement of the Western assessment of the Prophet. Although he rejects the old fables, he still describes the Prophet as a man of sensuality and the sword, an impostor and a false teacher who loved women and "had a most violent desire for them" (35). And because it was difficult for him to indulge in his sensual pleasures alone without being censured, he invented revelations to permit polygamy and "concubinage" for his people (36). Bayle tells that Muhammad feared the women of Persia and that this was the cause why he "did not go into that country, since they were so full of charms that the angels themselves might be overcome by them" (35).

In 1712, two Latin treatises by Adrian Reland, a professor of oriental languages at the University of Utrecht, were translated into English. Reland's book is prefixed with "The Life and Actions of Mahomet," written by the author, in which he lashes upon those who attacked Muhammad without knowledge, propagating false legends about him "in order to discredit both Mahomet and his Religion." Reland intended to give "the portraiture of this *grand Imposter*," and to represent him "in the most just, natural and lively Colours," placing him "in the same View, in which his own countrymen and disciples ... thought he ought to be consider'd" (5, my italics). However, for Reland, Islam is an imposture or Muhammad's "pretended mission," and Muhammad remains the imposter. Following Prideaux, Reland reiterates the suggestion that Muhammad's marriage to Khadijah fed his ambitious hopes to become sovereign of his people, "being naturally very subtle and crafty, ambitious and aspiring" (26).

Reland acknowledges that Muhammad was the leader of "one of the greatest revolutions that ever happen'd in the world" (78). Describing the Prophet's personal qualities, he says that

He was a Man of a very ready and piercing Wit, and undaunted Courage. He bore all Affronts without seeming to resent any; and apply'd himself to all sorts of People, without contemning the meanest. He was very courteous both in giving and receiving visits. The great Men he sooth'd with high Praises, and the Poor he relieved with Alms and Gifts; and towards all Men managed himself with that Art of Insinuation (in which he exceeded all Mankind) that at length he surmounted all the difficultys, to which so bold an Imposture must necessarily be liable. (79)

Reland's first treatise, *A Short System of Mohometan Theology*, based on Arabic sources, treats with considerable accuracy the basic tenets of the Islamic faith. In his preface to the treatise, Reland declares that he hopes "to put a stop to Lyes, and to give a view of a Religion, which hath spread so far, to every one that pleases; not as it is disguised and cover'd with the clouds of Detraction and Error" (8). There are sections on the belief in God and His divine qualities, the angels, God's divine books, His prophets, and the Last Day. There follows sections on the systems of prayer, alms, fasting, and the pilgrimage.

In the second treatise, "*Treating of Several Things falsely Charged upon the Mahometans*," Reland refutes thirty-nine charges commonly pointed at Islam by those who "endeavour'd to put a stop to a growing Evil and confute a most abominable Religion" (47). Thus he denies that Muslims conceived God to be corporeal, that they worshipped Venus, or worshipped all created beings. He also falsifies the common ideas that Muslims denied the providence of God, believed that God prayed to Muhammad, denied Hell, believed that women shall not enter Paradise, or that they went to Makkah to visit Muhammad's grave. Reyland contradicts Paul Rycaut in saying that Muslims believed it lawful to break covenants they entered into whenever they pleased.

Muhammad remains the imposter even in the most sympathetic Enlightenment accounts of him. Henry Boulainvilliers's book *La Vie de Mahomet* or *The Life of Mahomet*, published in 1728 and translated into English in 1731, is a fairly accurate account of the Prophet's life. Admitting in his preface that Boulainvilliers's idea of Muhammad is "so new and surprising, so different, and even contrary to all we have hitherto been taught concerning him," the anonymous translator hopes that Boulainvilliers's book would set such amiable examples of virtues so that Christians of his time learn "integrity, temperance, benevolence, and liberality, even from Saracens, Turks, and Mohometans" (iv).

Boulainvilliers presents Islam as a religious system that complies with reason and Muhammad as an extraordinarily gifted and capable man. Islam is a religion that is "stript of all controversy, and which proposing no mystery to offer violence to reason, confined the imaginations of men to be satisfied with a plain invariable worship". It is "the result of deep and long meditation upon the nature of things, upon the state and condition of the nations of the world at that time, and upon

the reconciliation of the objects of religion with reason” (163). The venture of Islam is an astonishing achievement that testifies to Muhammad’s extraordinary strength of character, his courage, and willpower:

Further, we may regard this scheme as the most stupendous enterprise, that the force of ambition could ever impose upon a hero of the most unbounded courage. Having comprehended the possibility of overthrowing two empires, that had been terrible to all mankind for so many ages, he undertook it without hesitation; tho’ he knew from the first moment, that to finish a design so astonishing, would require no less than to change that heart and minds of men, to tear them from themselves, their habits, their prejudices, their principles, in which they had been educated, and which were become inveterate. In a word, having coolly and calmly surveyed all the difficulties of this amazing plan, and having long ponder’d them all, he had the bravery to attempt it and the glory to accomplish it. (164)

“There would not have been a more plausible system of doctrine than [Muhammad’s],” Boulainvilliers concludes, “more agreeable to the light of reason, more comfortable to the righteous, more terrible to wilful and careless sinners” (179). Boulainvilliers dismisses the view of Muhammad as coarse and barbarous:

I maintain, that Mahomet, the imposter, was neither coarse nor barbarous; that he conducted his enterprise with all the art, all the delicacy, all the resolution, intrepidity, the extensive views, that Alexander or Caesar had been capable of, in his circumstances. (179)

Notwithstanding the lack of accuracy in recounting the early years of the Prophet’s life, such as the stories of his world travels through the Persian and Byzantine Empires, it remains that Boulainvilliers was capable of breaking new ground by presenting a bright picture of Muhammad, the great historical figure, the empire builder and the great legislator.

A landmark of the period was *The History of the Saracens* by the professor of Arabic at Cambridge Simon Ockley, published between 1708 and 1718. Based on Arabic sources and unpublished manuscripts, it is the first attempt to write a continuous history of the Arabs in English (Holt, 295). In his preface, Ockley states that the history of the Arabs deserves to be studied for its own sake because the Arabs “have had as great Men, and performed as considerable Action, as any other Nation under Heaven” (ix). Ockley expresses his dissatisfaction with the past treatment of the subject by those who, out of scorn for the Arabs, looked at them as “mere barbarians; which mistaken Notion of theirs, has hinder’d all further Enquiry concerning them” (xi). Ockley’s book reveals the writer’s admiration of many Muslim heroes and his appreciation of the role Arabic learning played in effecting the European

Renaissance (xv). As an attempt to redress the Western mistaken view of Islam, Ockley's book signals a considerable shift in the Western attitude to the Arabs, even though he continued to entertain such deep-seated disdainful views of Islam as superstition and of the prophet as "the great impostor" (1).

Ockley begins his history from the death of Muhammad because he felt that Prideaux's book had thoroughly covered the life and character of the prophet. But compared with Prideaux's book, Ockley's work is more in tune with the new attitudes towards Islam that distinguished the second half of the seventeenth century and the eighteenth century, lacking the former's acerbic tone.

The rapid expansion of Islam beyond the Arabian Peninsula is still explained here as a punishment of God, who raised them up "to be a Scourge to the Christian Church, for not living answerably to that most Holy Religion which they had received" (20). Although Ockley repeats the false idea that Muslims are enjoined by their prophet to "fight till all people were of their Religion" (21), still he cites with admiration of the Muslims' high warfare ethics some of Abu Baker's injunctions to his soldiers:

If you get the Victory, kill no little Children, nor no Fruit-Trees, nor do any Mischief to Cattle, only such as you kill to eat. When you make a Covenant or Article, stand to it, and be as good as your Word. As you go on, you will find some religious Persons that live retired in Monasteries, who propose to serve God that way: Let them alone, and neither kill them, nor destroy their Monasteries. (25)

Ockley also unreservedly admires the example of Umar's refusal to pray in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at the invitation of the Christian Patriarch so that Muslims would not take the church for themselves afterwards after he had promised them that "none of your Churches should be taken from you" (226). Ockley comments on Umar's behavior as "a noble Instance of singular Fidelity and religious Observation of Promise." "This Caliph did not think it enough to perform what he engaged himself, but used all possible Diligence to oblige others to do so too" (227-28).

In spite of the defects of Ockley's book, such as its historical inaccuracy in certain details, Byron Smith remarks that "by its beautiful simplicity of style it became almost a classic of prose, and was the main source of the history of Islam before Gibbon" (61). The other classic of Islamic studies from the period was the translation of the Qur'an by George Sale (? 1697 - 1736), which appeared in 1734. Sale's new translation from Arabic, which remained the standard version for more than a century, drew heavily on the 1691 Latin translation of the Italian monk Louise Marracci.

The translation is prefixed by a *Preliminary Discourse*, which provides a brief history of the Arabs before Muhammad, the condition of Christianity and Juda-

ism at the time of Muhammad's appearance, a brief biography of Muhammad, the doctrines of Islam, a review of Muslim sects, and an introduction to the Qur'an. Although he does not introduce a new assessment of the character of Muhammad, who continues in his introduction to be an imposter, Sale rejects Prideaux's unfavourable opinion of Islam compared with the religion of the Arabs before Muhammad:

His original design of bringing the pagan Arabs to the knowledge of the true God was certainly noble, and highly to be commended; for I cannot possibly subscribe to the assertion of a late learned writer, that he made that nation exchange their idolatry for another religion altogether as bad. Mohammed was no doubt fully satisfied in his conscience of the truth of his grand point, the unity of God, which was what he chiefly attended to. (28)

Sale rejects the eulogies of Arab historians as hyperbolic; however, he admits that Muhammad had the necessary virtues to help him accomplish his mission. Muhammad "was a man of at least tolerable morals, and not such a monster of wickedness as he is usually presented" (29). Sale laments the fact that many previous writers considered Muhammad's possession of many wives as a proof of his sensuality and wickedness, reminding his readers that "polygamy, though it be forbidden in the Christian religion, was in Muhammad's time frequently practiced in Arabia and other parts of the east, and was not counted an immorality, nor was a man the worse esteemed on that account" (29). Sale's importance is summed up by Holt:

His freedom from religious prejudice (in which respect he compares favourably with many of his nineteenth and twentieth century successors), his obvious conviction that Arabic writers were the best source of Arab history, and Muslim commentators the fittest to expound the Qur'an, marks an enormous advance on the hodgepodge of authorities' advanced by Prideaux. His work complements that of Ockley and for over a century the two played a leading part in creating the notion of the Prophet and the Arabs held by educated Englishmen. (302)

Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is considered a landmark in European historical writings. Volume fifty which relates the rise of Islam was published in 1788. Gibbon's rather sympathetic treatment of Islam and the character of the Prophet is a mixture of praise and censure. Describing "the qualifications of the prophet," he presents a marvelous portrayal of his admirable and exceptional personality:

According to the tradition of his companions, Mahomet was distinguished

by the beauty of his person, an outward gift which is seldom despised, except by those to whom it has been refused. Before he spoke, the orator engaged on his side the affections of a public or private audience. They applauded his commanding presence, his majestic aspect, his piercing eye, his gracious smile, his flowing beard, his countenance that painted every sensation of the soul, and his gestures that enforced each expression of the tongue. In the familiar offices of life he scrupulously adhered to the grave and ceremonious politeness of his country: his respectful attention to the rich and powerful was dignified by his condescension and affability to the poorest citizens of Mecca: the frankness of his manner concealed the artifice of his views; and the habits of courtesy were imputed to personal friendship or universal benevolence. His memory was capacious and retentive; his wit easy and social; his imagination sublime; his judgment clear, rapid, and decisive. He possessed the courage both of thought and action; and, although his designs might gradually expand with his success, the first idea which he entertained of his divine mission bears the stamp of an original and superior genius. (232)

And the message is as attractive as the messenger. Compared with the Christian creed of the Trinity, Islam provides the eternal truth of the unity of God:

The mysteries of the Trinity and Incarnation *appear* to contradict the principle of the divine unity. In their obvious sense, they introduce three equal deities, and transform the man Jesus into the substance of the Son of God: an orthodox commentary will satisfy only a believing mind: intemperate curiosity and zeal had torn the veil of the sanctuary; and each of the Oriental sects was eager to confess that all, except themselves, deserved the reproach of idolatry and polytheism. The creed of Mahomet is free from suspicion or ambiguity; and the Koran is a glorious testimony to the unity of God. (234)

The qualities of God that Muhammad preached with “rational enthusiasm” conform to the dictates of rational thinking. The “sublime creed” of Godhead in Islam would appeal to the theists of the Enlightenment.

The prophet of Mecca rejected the worship of idols and men, of stars and planets, on the rational principle that whatever rises must set, that whatever is born must die, that whatever is corruptible must decay and perish. In the Author of the universe, his rational enthusiasm confessed and adored an infinite and eternal being, without form or place, without issue or similitude, present to our most secret thoughts, existing by the necessity of his own nature, and deriving from himself all moral and intellectual perfection.

These sublime truths, thus announced in the language of the prophet, are firmly held by his disciples, and defined with metaphysical precision by the interpreters of the Koran. A philosophic theist might subscribe the popular creed of the Mahometans; a creed too sublime, perhaps, for our present faculties.

However, while admitting that Muhammad was an “extraordinary man” and “the author of a mighty revolution,” Gibbon traces the alleged degeneration of the Prophet from the original pure and benevolent motives at the beginning of his mission to “the use of fraud and perfidy, of cruelty and injustice.” He had recourse to such vileness because he believed that it “subservient to the propagation of the faith.” “From enthusiasm to imposture, the step is perilous and slippery … Of his last years, ambition was the ruling passion; and a politician will suspect, that he secretly smiled (the victorious impostor!) at the enthusiasm of his youth, and the credulity of his proselytes” (273-74). Notwithstanding the disappearance of acerbity in his tone, Gibbon as Smith remarks “leaves Muhammad very much where he found him: an imposter dominated by a single ruling passion” (112).

Eighteenth-Century Oriental Travel

The accounts of the travelers of the eighteenth century continued to help shape the new picture of Islam and Muslims that dared the prevalent view of Islam as a totally contemptible religion. Such richly illustrated volumes as the *Travels* of Thomas Shaw published in 1738 and Richard Pocock’s *Description of the East* (1743, 1745), shed new light on the culture, customs, religious practices, and the flora and fauna in Muslim countries.

The most interesting travel work from that period, however, is written by an aristocratic woman whose feminist tendencies were reflected upon her depiction of oriental women. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, published posthumously in 1763, records the observations of Lady Mary Montagu during her stay in Constantinople in 1717 and 1718 with her husband, Edward Wortley Montagu, the British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. The letters are written from the unique vantage point of a woman who had access to places which men were not able to reach and tackling feminine issues not discussed before. “For the first time in Western travel writing about the Orient,” Kader Konuk remarks, “exclusively female spaces became subject to the gaze of a European traveler.” Montagu learned Turkish and was admitted into the homes of the Turkish elite, conversing with men about religion and culture and observing the manners and fashions of women. Being a woman of a high social rank, she not only had access to the *harems* when she was invited to visit Turkish court ladies, but also to women’s public baths. In addition to being an eyewitness, Montagu was also well

versed in the writings of other authors, such as Richard Knolles, Paul Rycaut, and Jean Dumont, whom she never fails to disprove on a variety of issues, constantly repeating that her account of the Orient is more accurate and reliable than those of her predecessors. On one occasion, she dismisses previous descriptions of the Turks as

generally so far removed from the truth, and so full of absurdities ... They never fail giving you an account of the women, whom it is certain they never saw, and talking wisely of the genius of men, into whose company they are never admitted; and very often describe mosques, which they dare not even peep into. (189)

In another letter, she insures her friend Abbot Conti that previous accounts of the east were inaccurate for a variety of reasons:

It is certain we have very imperfect accounts of the manners and religion of those people; this part of the world being seldom visited by merchants, who mind little but their own affairs; or travelers, who make too short a stay to be able to report anything exactly of their own knowledge. (111)

Boasting of the privileges of class and sex that she had over male travelers of lesser social rank, Montagu says, “You will perhaps be surprised at an account so different from what you have been entertained with by the common voyage writers who are very fond of speaking of what they don’t know” since it is a rare thing “that a Christian would be admitted into the house of a man of quality; and their haram are always forbidden ground” (164).

Montagu tells Abbot Conti about her conversations with the learned effendi Achmet Beg that gave her “the opportunity of knowing their religion and morals in a more particular manner than perhaps any Christian ever did” (114). Thus, she knowingly tells us about the appeal of the Qur'an, “which is so far from the nonsense we charge it with, that it is the purest morality, delivered in the very best language” (116). She assures her friend that Muslims could very easily be converted to Protestantism because of the similarities that she noticed between the two faiths, especially as Muslims strongly detest the worship of images and abhor the adoration of the Virgin Mary as found in the Catholic doctrine (114).

Montagu’s letters show a particular interest in the conditions of Turkish women under Islam. First, she corrects the “vulgar” notion that Muslims believed that women did not have souls, and consequently had no place in Paradise. Women, she corrects, though considered in Islam “not of so elevated a kind, and therefore must not hope to be admitted into the Paradise appointed for the men,” however, they will have a separate place in Paradise “destined for souls of the *inferior* order” (194, my italics).

Marriage is the ideal state for women; they are created to give birth to children and to take care of them, and an unmarried woman is a useless one. Since a woman who dies unmarried “is looked upon to die in a state of reprobation … Many of them are very superstitious, and will not remain widows ten days, for fear of dying in the reprobate state of an useless creature” (193-94). About divorce, Montagu repeats another piece of mistaken theology, very probably taken from Rycaut (2, 59), namely that a man who would like to bring back his divorced wife could have that only by “permitting another man to pass a night with her” (193). The implication of this degrading notion is that the Turks treat their women as mere sex objects without dignity or any respect for themselves or their bodies. Moreover, a man who permits a stranger to sleep with his wife before he marries her is just a mere brute. Montagu also implies that Turks practice adultery, the only description for the disgraceful conduct described here.

The most famous passages in Montagu’s letters are those in which she talks about the freedom of Turkish women, compared with the confinement of European women. Denouncing the untruth and even the “stupidity” in the accounts of previous travelers who “lament the miserable Confinement of the Turkish ladies,” Montagu boldly asserts that

they are perhaps more free than any ladies in the universe, and are the only women in the world that lead a life of uninterrupted pleasure, exempt from cares, their whole time being spent in visiting, bathing, or the agreeable amusement of spending money, and inventing new fashions. (244)

Montagu’s praise turns out to be actually a satire of the care-free and simple-minded eastern woman. In another letter, she provides other reasons why Turkish women enjoy more liberty than their Western counterparts. Under the guise of the veil, Turkish women have the freedom of movement without being recognized, even by their husbands: “This perpetual Masquerade gives them entire Liberty of following their Inclinations without danger of Discovery” (135). Anna Secor remarks that Montagu turns “the metaphor of the veil, one of Europe’s most enduring symbols of the presumed backwardness and oppression of the Orient” into “a source of liberty” (392). The freedom that Motagu ascribes to Turkish women here is that of pursuing their sensual pleasures unnoticed and without fear; the veil actually becomes a symbol of sexual freedom. Relying on the associations of licentiousness of the word “masquerade,” Montagu confirms the views of the lustful and promiscuous women of the Orient, rather than praising their liberty.

Montagu does not however fail to admire the financial independence that Islam endows women with as another source of the liberty of Turkish women. As for polygamy, Montagu observes that although “their Law permits them four wives, but there is no instance of a man of quality that makes use of this liberty, or of a woman of rank that would suffer it” (136). Here too her defence is lacking because

it is based on the choice of women and men of social rank who shun polygamous marriage, rather than on showing the rationale behind the legislation.

Montagu is extremely impressed by the civility, majesty and grace of the ladies in the *harems*, of the wives of the grand vizier and his lieutenant. The accounts of her visits to those *harems*, the good manners of the Turkish ladies she met there, and the magnificence and beauty of their houses subvert the traditional image of the barbarous Turk: “and you may believe me,” she writes, “that the Turkish ladies have, at least, as much wit and civility, nay liberty, as among us” (246). Montagu dwells upon the sketch of the charming Fatima, the kahya’s lady, whom she lavishly praises for her extraordinary beauty, her gorgeous clothes, and her politeness:

Add to all this, a behaviour so full of grace and sweetness, such easy motions, with an air so majestic, yet free from stiffness or affectation, that I am persuaded, could she be suddenly transported upon the most polite throne of Europe, no body could her other than born and bred to be a queen, though educated in a country we call barbarous. To say all in a word, our most celebrated English beauties would vanish near her. (172-73)

Montagu recurrent references to the beauty of Turkish women runs against the common discourse of racial differences, but it also appeals to her correspondents’ expectations and their curiosity about Oriental women. The Oriental *harem* was one of the most visited themes in Western accounts of the Muslim Orient. According to Leslie P. Peirce,

We in the West are heir to an ancient but still robust tradition of obsession with the sexuality of Islamic society. The *harem* is undoubtedly the most prevalent symbol in Western myths constructed around the theme of Muslim sensuality. One of the most fertile periods for the production of texts and images treating this theme was the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, and the most frequent subject the court of the Ottoman sultan. (3)

In addition to her erotic allusions in describing her visits to the baths in Sophia and Constantinople, her accounts of the fabulous opulence and extravagance of the *harems* draw upon images of the imaginary world of the sensual and exotic Orient of the *Arabian Nights*. Besides, the detailed descriptions of the dresses of women, the precise accounts of the furniture, the precious utensils and napkins, and the grand architectural motifs create a sense of verisimilitude that invokes the atmosphere of the *Nights*. In the *Turkish Letters*, Montagu seeks to present, through the authority of the writer as an eyewitness, a confirmation of the contemporary orientalist discourse that the *Nights* helped create:

This you will say, but too like the Arabian tales – these embroidered napkins! And a jewel as large as a turkey’s egg! – You forget, dear sister, those very tales were written by an author of this country, and (excepting the enchantments) are a real representation of the manners here. (220-21)

Montagu, according to Anna Secor, “sought, in her journey to Turkey, the actualization of these Oriental tales,” by conflating “the imaginary Orient and the world she finds around her” (384-85). Thus, while purportedly endeavoring to demolish the unauthentic and legendary material that previous travelers propagated about the Orient, Montagu helped to foster the mythical and imaginary orientalist discourse born out of the budding romantic outlook of the eighteenth century.

Montagu’s defiance of the discourse of difference between the sophisticated European and the uncultured barbarian Turk is heavily qualified by her own text. Montagu’s admiration of Turkish and Arabic poetry, music, and architecture attests to the artistic refinement of the Turks and their cultural sophistication, invalidating the image of the savage and uncultured Turk. However, her praise of Turkish arts is often qualified by descriptions that enclose them within the discourse of the *Noble Savage* rather than establish them as the product of a rational and superior intelligence that would match the Western mind. She is very pleased with the Arabic poetry that Achmet Beg reads to her, although it sounds to her different from English verse (99). Yet, the Turkish poetry she translates in a letter to the famous English poet Alexander Pope expresses, in her description, such “violence of passion, which is very seldom felt amongst us” (152). She also finds the mosques and public inns “extremely magnificent” (165); the mosque of Sultan Selim I, she says, is “infinitely beyond any church in Germany or England” (187), and the mosque of Sultana Valida is “the most beautifull structure I ever saw ... Paul’s church would make a pitiful figure near it” (237). Still, she finds fault with Islamic architecture, considering Turkish palaces “entirely irregular.” Although she likes this alleged irregularity, yet she dwells upon its unintelligibility: “There is nothing that can be properly called front or wings; and though such a confusion is, I think, pleasing to the sight, yet it would be very unintelligible in a letter” (261). “The imaginary Orient, in all its unknowable irregularity,” Secor comments, “is represented here by the Turkish architectural structure which can only be described by pointing to its elusion of description” (385).

Notwithstanding Montagu’s relativistic and avowedly unbiased approach to the Orient, there is no denying the fact that her letters bespeak the same notions about the Orientals that she claims to deny. “The manners of mankind do not differ so widely, as our voyage-writers would make us believe,” she professes, and in another letter, she tells Abbot Conte that Orientals are not inferior, but rather different: “You see, Sir, these people are not so unpolished as we represent them. ‘Tis true, their magnificence is of a different taste from ours, and perhaps of a bet-

ter.” However, the comparison that follows replicates the deep-seated orientalist dichotomy of Western rationality and Oriental irrationality:

I am almost of opinion, they have a right notion of life. They consume it in music, gardens, wine, and delicate eating, while we are tormenting our brains with some scheme of politics, or studying some science to which we can never attain, or if we do cannot persuade other people to set that value upon it we do ourselves ... I allow you to laugh at me for the sensual declaration in saying, that I had rather be a rich effendi, with all his ignorance, than Sir Isaac Newton with all his knowledge. (262)

While seemingly praising the Oriental outlook, she sets two views of life against each other for us to compare. On the one hand there is the realm of the Orient, of idyllic bliss, the carnal pleasures of eating and drinking, opulence, and ignorance. On the other hand there is the Western realm of political intricacy, science, and knowledge. She half-heartedly allies herself with the sensual world of the rich ignorant effendi, to the rejection of Isaac Newton.

The same ambivalent treatment runs through all the letters. Thus, while, in some places, she defends the Turks against the charge of cruelty, in other places, she depicts horrible images of extreme cruelty. On the one hand, she applauds the Turks’ “humanity” towards their slaves, declaring that they are “not naturally cruel,” and do not deserve the “barbarous character we give them” (248). On the other hand, she describes their cruelty in one letter after another. For instance, she tells us how people would punish a minister whom they resent:

None of our harmless calling names! But when a minister here displeases the people, in three hours time he is dragged even from his master’s arms. They cut off his hand and feet, and throw them before the palace gate, with all the respect in the world; while the sultan (to whom they all profess an unlimited adoration) sits trembling in his apartment, and dare not revenge his favourite. (125)

On the whole, Montagu’s dissociating herself from the inherited orientalist discourse about the lustful and despotic Turk is belied by her ambivalent text. Instead of revising the Western convictions about Muslims, she confirms those firmly implanted preconceptions and prejudices she brought with her to the land of Islam. Partaking in the newly-born Romantic orientalism, equally misleading in representing the Muslim East, though less antagonistic in tone, she perpetuates the misrepresentation process, by virtue of her preconditioning by the climate of opinion of the early eighteenth century. While the cultural atmosphere into which she was born resulted in the relinquishment of certain ideas about Islam, it still favored the continuation of many debasing stereotypes of the Muslims and their religion.

The Oriental Tale

The French translation of the *Arabian Nights* done by Antoine Galland between 1704 and 1718, along with the English translations based on it, and the German translation by Bohse-Talander in 1730, were of a tremendous impact upon the European mind, literary sensibility, and artistic taste during the eighteenth century. Heraldng the Romantic Movement, the tales played a great role in countering the austere rationality of the Age of Reason with their appeal to the senses and their display of unbridled imagination. A wave of enthusiasm for the exotic oriental settings and the oriental dreamy realms of opulence, inhabited by lascivious women and fierce men, spread throughout Europe. Thus, one of the major results of the publication of the *Arabian Nights* in Europe was that it added force to the conceptual image of Muslims as voluptuous and of Islam as encouraging self-indulgences and endorsing sexual license. The vogue of the *Arabian Nights* resulted in the translation of more oriental tales in addition to stimulating a host of literary imitations. Montesuieu's *Persian Letters* (1721), Voltaire's *Zadig* (1748), Samuel Johnson's *Rasselass* (1759), Oliver Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World* (1762), William Beckford's *Vathek* (1789) are some of the best examples of this genre.

Montesquieu's epistolary novel, *Persian Letters* is an example of how Oriental material was often appropriated to focus on European religious and political issues. To evade censorship, the book adopts the technique of foreign observers, two Persian visitors to France, Uzbek and Rica, to comment on the social and political institutions of France. The letters exchanged between the two Persian visitors and their wives, servants, and friends at home allows the writer to make fun of the conditions in France and to criticize all forms of religious and political despotism. The letters present a picture of the Oriental selaglio as a site of confinement, repression, and cruelty. As such, the *harem* represents one aspect of political repression, which was Montesuieu's main concern. Muslim social and political systems were not the target of Montesquieu's sarcasm, but they were rather used as a disguised means of attacking the despotic regime in France while. "Preoccupied with its own forms of monarchical absolutism," Leslie P. Peirce notes, "Europe elaborated a myth of oriental tyranny and located its essence in the sultan's *harem*" (3).

William Beckford's *Vathek* (1789), originally written in French, exerted a great influence on the works of oriental romanticism such as Byron's oriental poems, Thomas Moore's "Lollah Rookh," and Robert Southey's "Thalaba the Destroyer." *Vathek* is the product of a lifelong concern with the Orient, a deep interest that led him to diligently preoccupy himself with learning Arabic, hiring an Arab tutor by the name of zemir for that purpose. The *Arabian Nights* was an early source of inspiration for Beckford, along with a huge repository of oriental material that he found in his father's library, including the oriental material brought by Lady Mary Montagu's son. Beckford's erudite explanatory notes to *Vathek* attest to Beck-

ford's familiarity with the most important works of orientalist scholarship available at his time, primarily Sale's translation of the Qur'an and his *Preliminary Discourse*, d'Herbelot's *Biblioteque Orientale*, in addition to the *Arabian Nights*. The notes aim at giving a sense of authenticity and legitimacy to the narrative. Presenting the narrative as a history of an actual caliph also adds to the sense of genuineness of the world described.

In William Beckford's *Vathek* (1789), the Muslim Caliph Vathek is a despotic ruler, who is given to a life of indulgencies of all kinds. In search of hidden treasures and forbidden knowledge, he seeks the help of the Giaour, who promises to help him have access to the treasures of pre-adamite kings. In return for the devil's assistance, Vathek had to abjure Muhammad. On his way to Istakhar to arrive at the promised treasures, he meets the lovely princess Nouronihar, who forsakes her lover Gulchenrouz and agrees to accompany him in his quest. When Vathek and Nouronihar reach the promised place, they meet Eblis, the Arch-devil. His heart enveloped in flames, Vathek is informed by the Giaour that he is in "the abode of vengeance and despair," to suffer as other votaries of Eblis. The end of the story records its lesson:

Such was, and such should be, the punishment of unrestrained passions and atrocious deeds! Such shall be, the chastisement of that blind curiosity, which would transgress those bounds the wisdom of the Creator has prescribed to human knowledge; and such the dreadful disappointment of that restless ambition, which, aiming at discoveries reserved for beings of a supernatural order, perceives not, through its infatuated pride, that the condition of man upon earth is to be – humble and ignorant. Thus the Caliph Vathek, who, for the sake of empty pomp and forbidden power, had sullied himself with a thousand crimes, became a prey to grief without end, and remorse without mitigation: whilst the humble, the despised Gulchenrouz passed whole ages in undisturbed tranquility, and in the pure happiness of childhood. (150-51)

The inevitable punishment for the illegitimate search for "forbidden power" is the subject of the tale. The Faustian pact with the devil for the appropriation of forbidden knowledge and power, a Western theme that is most famously treated by Goethe in the celebrated drama of *Faust* in 1808, is presented in *Vathek* as an oriental tale adorned with the exotic oriental atmosphere that was in vogue in the late seventeenth century and endowed with the Islamic paraphernalia that would give it roots in the Muslim East.

In spite of the author's claim to historical authenticity, *Vathek* actually partakes in the orientalist gross misrepresentation and sensational stereotyping of the Orient. The notes, as well as the novel itself, do not depart from the established image and the mistaken and crude misconceptions about Islam and the Muslim

Orient. Both the text and the notes abound in wrong ideas about the Islamic faith and overflow with all forms of historical inaccuracies. One of the salient features related to Islamic belief in the story is the position of the Prophet Muhammad. Throughout the novel, Muhammad assumes the status of the omnipotent and powerful deity. He resides in the seventh heaven, watching over the behavior of people. Muslim characters in the book invoke and beseech him, or ask him for forgiveness, a repetition of the old medieval notion of Muhammad as God. Muhammad presides over and frowns upon the conduct of the irreligious Vathek. The omniscient Muhammad tells the Genii that Vathek is doomed. The predominance of Muhammad in the minds of the characters and the complete absence of references to Allah is a disturbing quality in the novel that entirely disagrees with the basic principles of Islamic faith, in which Muhammad is the prophet of God, not the founder of the faith or the God of Muslims.

The depiction of Hell at the end of the novel also disagrees with the picture of Hell as described in the Qur'an. Eblis himself is depicted as an awesome and admirable presence:

His person was that of a young man, whose noble and regular features seemed to have been tarnished by malignant vapours. In his large eyes appeared both pride and despair: his flowing hair retained some resemblance to that of an angel of light. In his hand, which thunder had blasted, he swayed the iron sceptre, that causes the monster Ouranbad, the afrits, and all the powers of the abyss to tremble. (139)

Many of the informative notes are at least inaccurate and in many cases deceptive. The note about the position of the “caliph” in Islam, for instance, presents him as a sacred person. On the authority of Habesci and d'Herbelot, the note tells that this Islamic title comprises the character of “prophet, priest, and king; and is used to signify the Vicar of God on earth” (153). The representation of the Muslim ruler as sensual, corrupt, dissolute, despotic, “much addicted to women and the pleasures of the table,” shares in the commonplace perception of the Muslim Orient as the land of despotism and carnal lusts. By the Islamic standards, the image of the Muslim Orient in *Vathek* is wide of the mark, and the representation of Islam is totally incorrect and even blasphemous.

Beckford's purpose was not to present a realistic image of the world of Islam but rather to create the illusion of a hedonistic, exotic, and erotic Orient populated by a mixture of the bizarre characters of Genii, Afrits, mullahs, and eunuchs, inhabiting the most exotic locale. The description of the caliph's five palaces built for the gratification of all the senses, aims at creating a superb atmosphere of the world of the hedonistic Orientals. The caliph is surrounded with all the richness and splendor of the Orient of the *Arabian Nights*. In the palace of “the Eternal or unsatiating Banquet,” the most exquisite dainties were supplied both by night

and by day, and the most delicious wines flowed forth from fountains. In the “The Temple of Melody,” music flowed incessantly. In “The Delight of the Eyes,” curious objects, pictures, and statues, collected from all corners of the earth are arranged. “The Palace of Perfumes” is dedicated to all the perfumes, aromas, and fragrant flower of the world. The fifth palace, “The Retreat of Mirth,” was inhabited by “troops of young females, beautiful as the Houris, and not less seducing” (8-9). The vivid description of the lush and verdant setting, a world of extravagant luxury, uninhibited joys, forbidden and unrestrained diabolic desires was part of the legacy of the *Arabian Nights* in the Western imagination. The resultant highly imaginative picture appealed to an enthusiastic audience yearning for release from the strict rule of reason and inflamed their fancy by stories of wonder and mystery about remote lands and strange people.

German Literary Orientalism

Probably, the best pronouncement of the spirit of the Enlightenment is a classic play written by the German critic, playwright, and philosopher Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729- 81). Set in Jerusalem at the time of the Crusades, Lessing’s *Nathan the Wise* (1779) is a plea for religious tolerance. The main character in the play is the Jewish merchant Nathan, who had lost his wife and seven children to religious fanaticism and bigotry against his people, when they were killed at the hands of Christian knights. But Nathan, known for his wisdom more than for his wealth, is able to transcend his feelings of bitterness and adopts a Christian girl, Recha, for whom he employs a devout Christian governess to raise in the Christian faith. While on a business trip, fire breaks in his house and a Templar saves his daughter’s life. To the devout Daja, who believes that it was an angel who saved Recha, Nathan replies that man “is to a man still dearer than an angel” (Act I, scene 1, 10). The Templar refuses Nathan’s invitation to his home so that Recha would express her gratitude to her savior; as a Templar, he cannot enter the house of a Jew, he says. Nathan tells the Templar that when he rescued his daughter, he was showing humanity towards another human, not acting as Templar. A Human’s love and compassion towards other humans are common emotions that supersede religious affiliations.

The centerpiece of the play is the parable of the three rings, based on a tale in Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. When Saladin asks Nathan to tell him which religion he thinks is true, Nathan responds with a story about three sons whose father owned a magical ring with the power to make whoever wears it pleasant in the eyes of God and humans. Because he loves his sons equally, the father cannot decide to whom he should give the ring. So he orders two duplicates made, and on his deathbed he gives each son a ring without telling them which is the real one. When the sons quarrel over who is the owner of the true ring, they go the judge, who tells them

that the genuine ring will be revealed by the actions of its wearer. The judge's verdict implies that since none of the three fighting sons demonstrates the proper love and tolerance that become the one who would be in possession of the true thing, the authentic ring is in fact lost and all three sons are not worthy of their father's legacy. The claimants to the ring of truth without showing tolerance towards each other cannot have legitimate possession of truth. Apart from its expression of the skepticism characteristic of the Enlightenment period, the play remains a profound expression of the spirit of religious tolerance and pluralism. *Nathan the Wise*, Wilfried Wilms remarks,

celebrates tolerance and promotes the inclusion of the Other into a universal ‘family of Man’ that transcends the narrow boundaries of religion, cultures, and even nations. The fundamental sameness of all members of that family is recognized and acknowledged, so that the conflict based on the collision of only seemingly antagonistic interests becomes obsolete. (307)

The three revealed religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are represented in the play by three characters, who eventually turn out to be close relatives, a reference to the mutual origin of the three monotheistic faiths. The Muslim character, Saladin, figures so prominently as the wise, just, tolerant, and chivalrous Muslim ruler who kept his promises and who spared the lives of his opponents and who protected the freedom of worship at all costs in his kingdom.

Among the translations of Arabic, Turkish, and Persian literature that appeared in the eighteenth century, those of the German orientalist Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (1774 - 1856) were particularly important. In addition his translations of works from Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, his translation of the poetry of Hafez which appeared in 1813 came to have its full effect in the poetry of Germany's great bard Goethe. Purgstall also translated other. The German poet and dramatist Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749 - 1832), whose work was instrumental in the inauguration of Romanticism in European literature, through initiating, along with J. G. Herder, the “Sturm und Drang” movement, was another major writer who developed a deep interest in Islam and Oriental cultures. Throughout his career, Goethe was preoccupied with the Orient and fascinated in the cultures of Islam. The Orient symbolized for Goethe, Walter Veit argues, “the cradle of civilization, where he hoped to discover the origins of language and poetry. Furthermore, Goethe's exoticism was used to critique the superficiality and hypocritical foundations of European culture.” Persian poets, Firdausi, Rumi, Saadi, and Hafiz embodied for him “the origin of poetry, or indeed the origin of European civilization” (166). The mysticism in his *Divan* is inspired by his readings of Purgstall's translation of Hafez.

In addition to his vast readings in Persian poetry, Goethe was familiar with historical books on the Muslim East, as well as the travel books of Mandeville,

Tavernier, and Chardin. He may also have read Carsten Neibour's *Travels to Arabia* and Volney's *Voyage en Egypte et en Syrie*. Goethe was also influenced by such orientalists as Silvestre de Sacy, Joseph von Hammer-Purgestall, and Sir William Jones. An early outcome of Goethe's preoccupation with the Orient of Islam, *Song of Mahomet* (1774) was intended as a dramatic piece entitled *Mahomet*, a plan that was not carried out. The *West-Eastern Divan*, (1815) represents Goethe's retreat into the spiritual haven of the East.

In the *Song of Mahomrt*, Goethe presents an image of the message of Muhammad, gathering strength and flowing as a powerful stream of a divine origin, rejuvenating the ground and creating centers of civilization along its shores. The poem opens:

*See the rock-born stream!
Like the gleam
Of a star so bright!
Kindly spirits
High above the clouds
Nourished him while youthful
In the copse between the cliffs. (163)*

The river of Islam spreads life in every place it reaches:

*'Neath his footsteps spring the flowers,
And the meadow
In his breath finds life. (164)*

The glorious river is not hindered or delayed by any obstacles or distractions. Wherever it arrives, it is joyfully welcomed, and along its path, the dashing river gathers tributaries in its unyielding advance towards its ultimate destination, its origin, the eternal ocean of infinite life.

*And now moves he
O'er the plain in silv'ry glory,
And the plain in him exults,
And the rivers from the plain,
And the streamlets from the mountain,
Shout with joy, exclaiming: "Brother,
Brother, take thy brethren with thee,
With thee to thine agèd father,
To the everlasting ocean,
Who, with arms outstretching far,
Waiteth for us; (164)*

As it grows and gathers strength, it confers life on people and gives names to cities and countries. Islam is a life-giving faith, endowed with a great spiritual power, and there is no ending to its majestic march.

*And now swells he
Lordlier still; yea, e'en a people
Bears his regal flood on high!
And in triumph onward rolling,
Names to countries gives he, -- cities
Spring to light beneath his foot.
Ever, ever, on he rushes, (165)*

In Goethe's *West-Eastern Divan*, whose poems are composed between 1814 and 1819, the culture of the Muslim world emerges in a different shape. The poems of the *Divan* are inspired by the work of Hafez and the other mystical Persian poets. The poems are a tribute to Eastern wisdom and a plea for the yoking of Eastern and Western components of civilization in one inseparable entity. Both east and west lie in God's "gentle hand" as the "Talismans," the introductory poem of the *Divan* states:

*God is of the east possess'd,
God is ruler of the west;
North and south alike, each land
Rests within His gentle hand.
He, the only righteous one,
Wills that right to each be done.*

Thus, Goethe expresses the necessity of appreciating the eastern contribution to humanity and of trying to bridge the gap between the two sides of human civilization. Many poems in the *Divan* express Islamic truths and many of them are written in a spirit of admiration of Islam. But it remains important to understand what the east actually signifies for Goethe. Minou Reeves argues that, influenced by the unorthodox *sufi* Persian poets he cherished, the essence of Goethe's Islamic East does not eventually depart from the commonplace Western views of the East of song, wine, and sensuality. "Goethe thought he had found in Muhammad's religion," Reeve contends, "a dimension of sensuality and a celebration of the earthly which was missing in Christianity" (220).

Thus, in imitation of Persian mystical poetry, Goethe praises wine as the way to approach God and to attain divine knowledge. Hafez, whom Goethe greatly admired, and for whom he addresses many of his poems in the *Divan*, "believed that he had come closer to divine truth by drinking wine than by praying in a mosque of his time, which he lamented had moved away from the spirit of Muhammad"

(Reeves 222). In one poem, Goethe expresses his boundless admiration of the Qur'an although he also implies that wine is a superior conduit to truth and to the knowledge of God:

*Can the Koran from Eternity be?
'Tis worth not a thought!
Can the Koran a creation, then, be?
Of that, I know nought!
Yet that the book of all books it must be,
I believe, as a Mussulman ought.
That from Eternity wine, though, must be,
I ever have thought;
That 'twas ordain'd, ere the Angels, to be,
As a truth may be taught.
Drinkers, however these matters may be,
Gaze on God's face, fearing nought.* (380)

The poem reveals Goethe's knowledge of the theological debate over whether the Qur'an was created or that it is eternal. Though he cannot make his mind about this, he is certain of the eternal existence of wine.

Muhammad's sensual Paradise, the subject of repeated attacks by Western critics of Islam, finds its way into the *Divan*; in the *Book of Paradise*, the martyrs of the battle of Badr are welcomed by the Houris who serve them wine

*Now a balmy zephyr from the East
Brings the heavenly maidens to thy view;
With the eye thou now dost taste the feast,
Soon the sight pervades thee through and through.
There they stand, to ask thee thy career:
Mighty plans? or dangerous bloody rout?
Thou'rt a hero, know they, -- for thou'rt here,
What a hero? -- This they'll fathom out.
By thy wounds soon clearly this is shown,
Wounds that write thy fame's undying story;
Wounds the true believer mark alone,
When have perish'd joy and earthly glory.
To chiosks and arbours thou art brought,
Fill'd with chequer'd marble columns bright;
To the noble grape-juice, solace-fraught,
They the guest with kindly sips invite.
Youth! Thou'rt welcome more than e'er was youth
All alike are radiant and serene;*

*When thou tak'st one to thine heart with truth,
Of thy band she'll be the friend and queen.
So prepare thee for this place of rest,
Never can it now be changed again;
Maids like these will ever make thee blest,
Wines like these will never harm thy brain.* (386)

In his introduction to the *Divan*, the German poet Heine recognizes that the soul of East, as it appears in Goethe's poems, lies in its sensuality. Heinrich Heine (1797 - 1856) commends the poems because they represent the East as closely as the Westerners see to be its essence; the poems are

as enchanting as a harem emitting the most delicious and rare perfumes, and blooming with exquisitely-lovely nymphs with eyebrows painted black, eyes piercing as those of the antelope, arms white as alabaster, and of the most graceful and perfectly formed shapes ... Sometimes also the reader may imagine himself indolently stretched on a carpet of Persian softness, luxuriously smoking the yellow tobacco of Turkistan through a long tube of jessamine and amber, while a black slave fans him with a fan of peacock's feathers, and a little boy presents him with a cup of genuine Mocha. Goethe has put these enchanting and voluptuous customs into poetry... (qtd. in Goethe, *Poems* 373)

Heine concludes that "the West is tired of thin and icy-cold spirituality, and seeks warmth in the strong and healthy bosom of the East" (374). Another admirer of Islam, Heine expresses ideas about the Islamic East that feed into the deep-rooted concurrence about its sensuality.

Conclusion

The making of the Western image of the Muslim Orient started with the Greek and Roman views of the Asians, in general, and the Persians, in particular, as barbarians and uncivilized vis-à-vis the civilized and democratic Europeans. As early as the eighth century, the Arab and Byzantine Christians saw the Muslims in the light of the Bible, which remained in the hands of later theologians a generator of some of the most hostile interpretations of the coming of Islam, the character of the Arab Muslims, and the nature of the Prophet, primarily presenting the Prophet as the Antichrist of the biblical apocalyptic visions. The Middle Ages were strained times in the relationship between European Christians and the Muslims. Against the backdrop of the Crusades, some of the most offensive material and absurd fantasies were created about Islam and the Prophet. Throughout the Renaissance period, Islam remained shrouded in ignorance, and many legendary material and erroneous views persisted, especially in works of literature.

The rise of the Ottomans and their encroachment upon the European soil occasioned a resurgence of the antagonistic responses to Islam, informed by fear and apprehension. At the same time, the growth of trade and the development of economic and diplomatic ties between the European states and the Ottoman Empire were accompanied by a flux of Europeans visiting the Ottoman provinces and reporting with considerable accuracy on the different conditions in the Empire. The new first-hand experience in the travel accounts of the seventeenth century, however, did not help dispel the wrong ideas or reverse the Western negative attitudes toward Islam. As the older stereotypical images of sensuality and violence were superimposed on new representations of the Turkish identity; the resultant was the widely accepted view, throughout the Renaissance period, of the lustful and cruel Turk. Hover, alongside this negative view, the Ottoman Empire was also admired as a model of bureaucratic efficiency and military prowess.

A more informed image of Islam slowly and timidly found its way in some of the Enlightenment's attempted reappraisals. In addition to the theological polemical writings and the more secular accounts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as found in the travelers' accounts and the historical works, there emerged a new dimension that came to inform the Westerners' views of the Muslim Orient. With the translation of the *Arabian Nights*, the exotic image of the East as the land of riches, unrestrained pleasures, and wild adventures gained ground.

The basic components of the Western prejudiced image, however, have survived these attempts. While the Western image of Islam and the Muslim Orient has undergone a remarkable development from the absurd medieval and Renaissance portrayals of Muhammad's character and the false ideas about Islam and its adherents to the milder criticisms of the eighteenth-century thinkers, the main-

stream opinion throughout these centuries continued to be in the main negative.

The development of the Western view of Islam cannot be perceived as a linear progression from ignorance towards a better understanding, but rather as a cyclical evolution in which ideas, motifs, and perceptions are repeated in the different periods, the older themes are retackled, and prejudices and misconceptions are recycled. It is more like a polyphonic composition in which the musical notes are repeated in different variations. In the rest of the story, new political and cultural changes on the global arena will give rise to more dramatic twists in the relations between Islam and the Western world. A new Crusade is envisioned in some Western circles, and the reconstruction of the imaginary Muslim enemy is again based on mistaken conceptions of Islam and inherited stereotypes the Muslims. Never before has the need for mutual understanding been so urgent

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